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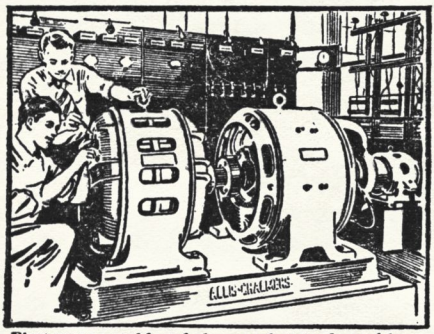

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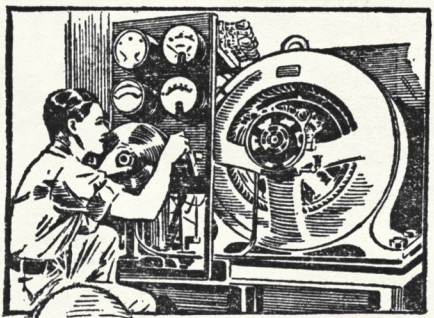

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Strange STORIES

VOL. IV, NO. 3 DECEMBER, 1940

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THE MANCI CURSE

A Complete Weird Novelet

By DOROTHY QUICK

Alice Parker Lives Anew the Peril of Past Ages, the Gruesome Mystery of Walking Cadavers and the Evil Sorcery of a Demoniac Siren 16

STRANGE STORIES, published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter November 3rd, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Yearly, $.60; single copies, $.10; Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

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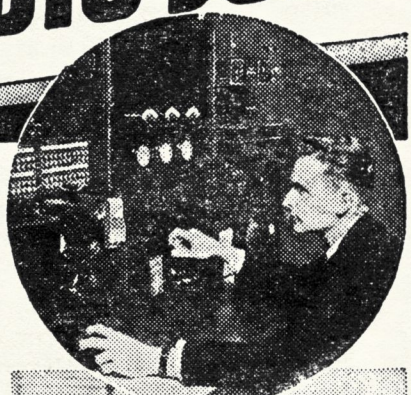

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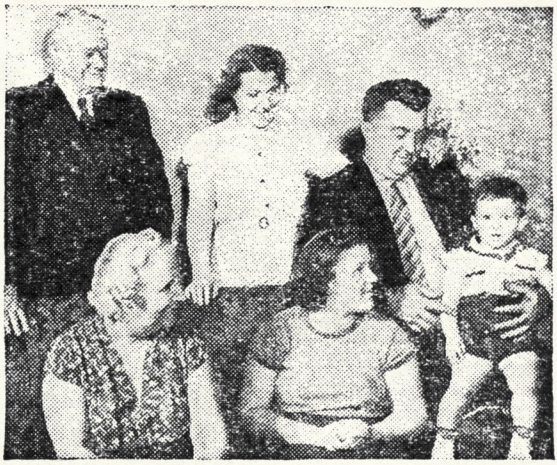

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63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
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Then here's grand news for you! You can learn to play your favorite musical instrument, *any* instrument, for less than SEVEN CENTS a day! That's ALL it costs. Not a penny extra for sheet music or anything else. And it doesn't take years, either.

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Actually, you start playing a familiar melody in your very FIRST lesson. Then you go on from one tune to another, until your friends are surprised to hear you play.

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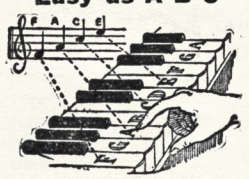
You learn by a remarkable short-cut method! A modern, simplified method that skips all the tedious, old-fashioned study and practice. A method that has literally swept the world, enrolling over 700,000 pupils. It's actually FUN to learn music this easy way.

Easy as A-B-C



Look at the notes above—they are F-A-C-E. Could anything be simpler? You are already learning to read music. And it's easy to play, too, for a remarkable invention, the "Note-Finder," tells you just where each note is located on the keyboard.

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"Lost Horizon" by James Hilton revealed an inkling of Tibetan black arts, but western civilization says "fiction." Still, Hilton will not admit that all of it is fantasy. Modern explorers who have spent time in Tibet and northern India, look at you pityingly when you question their stories.

Even Harrison Forman, a world authority on the mysteries of Tibet, will admit to friends that he saw things beyond the realm of imagination—things which he dare not include in his travel books for fear of being called insane and a liar.

Skeptics laugh and blame the tales of Tibet on high altitudes where modern men faint and bleed and are given to hallucinations by the rare atmosphere which does strange things to men's minds. But modern man does not change his mental make-up even in an airplane in altitudes of 20,000 feet. His body might feel it—but his mind does not cloud, nor does the altitude give him magic powers.

The Mysterious Plateau

TIBET, 1878: A boy running away from home, lost on the barren sun-bleached mountain side, weak from hunger and thirst. He lies down in what he fears may be the sleep of death. Suddenly he hears a voice, a deep tone, a voice of authority: "Arise, my son—follow me."

The boy jumps up—his hunger and thirst are gone, his body is refreshed, but he has had no food or water. He trails along like a faithful dog behind his master. He knows that the fatherly man before him is a monk of the highest rank.

Many miles they trudge along, up, ever up winding trails, higher and higher into the mountains streaked with snow, their tops obscured by sun-tinted clouds.

Then suddenly, as though heaven had just dropped it there, they reach a strange plateau. There is no sound. The clouds have been left behind far down the mountain side. The sky is blue—the sun down near the horizon no longer hurts the boy's eyes.

He looks ahead. A huge temple greets his gaze. It is surrounded by beautiful gardens, sprinkled by flowers and plants the boy has never seen before. There is a dome on top of the square temple, but the dome is not entirely enclosed. He sees an archway. Yes, another monk is standing under that arch. The monk waves his arm and the man with the boy answers the signal but does not call out.

A Strange Room

How quiet everything is, naught but the sound of birds singing in the sky. Other monks are now seen in the gardens as the two approaching ones get closer to the temple.

The others smile at the approaching monk, but say nothing. They seem to be conversing with their eyes—at least that is the impression the boy gets.

Soon they are in a strange room, spacious, exquisite—large windows, colored glass, beautiful statues, paintings, vases and odd ornaments. The chairs seem soft as beds. The boy touches one but he does not sit on it although he wishes he might.

The master beckons him on, into a large stone room. A kitchen—for the boy smells food and realizes he is hungry.

"Eat and drink, my son," comes the command; and the boy at last gives way to his craving for nourishment. The monk stands near the table and smiles. The boy knows he is welcome and he becomes a real boy again with youthful appetite and thirst. Through the corners of his eyes he sees other monks smiling approvingly.

Later, he tries to tell them who he is and his reason for leaving home, escaping a cruel step-father, although he loves his mother.

(Continued on page 10)

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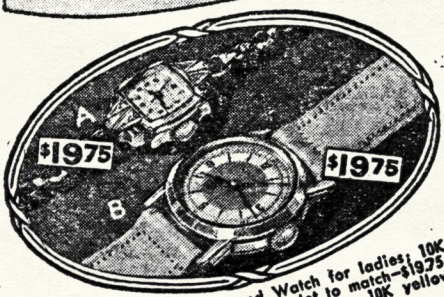

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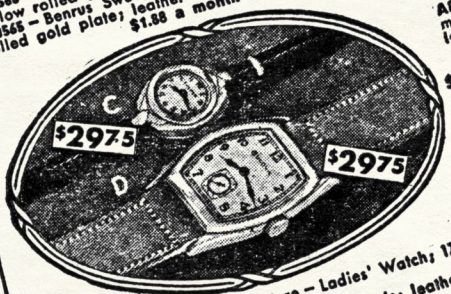

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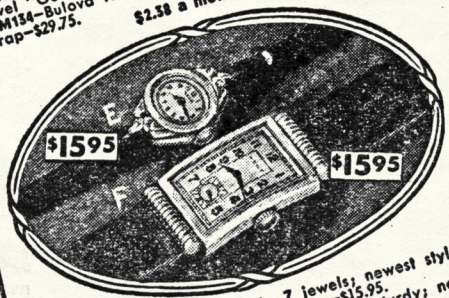

E-P159—Ladies' Kent Watch; 7 jewels; newest style 10K yellow rolled gold plate case—$15.95.
F-K190—Man's Kent Watch; 7 jewels; sturdy; new style; 10 yellow rolled gold plate case—$15.95.
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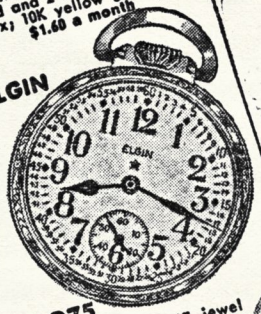

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THE BLACK ARTS

(Continued from page 8)

They don't ask him and he does not have to tell them. They seem to know everything. They tell him things about himself before the words have reached his own lips.

What manner of men are these—who know his mind and speak to him but do not speak to each other except by motions, nods and smiles?

They tell him he may remain with them as an employee with definite chores to perform each day. He accepts their offer and soon shows his appreciation by doing what he is told without second command.

But it is days before boylike questions pop out of his mouth. The monks explain carefully, answering not only questions he has asked, but thought. They admit that they talk to each other, only he can't hear them.

Then, a few weeks later, he is sitting on his stool in the great room where the monks congregate after supper, looking at an album of small paintings. He sees a picture of a home, a house like his step-father's. For a moment the lad is homesick for his mother. Was she all right? Was his step-father kind to her now that he was no longer in the way?

The Vision in the Wall

The thought had no sooner filled his mind, when he hears a clap of hands, his signal for attention from the master who had found him.

The boy looks up. The master is smiling. "Son," says the kindly one, "look at the wall."

As he does so, a mist seems to gather between him and the wall. Then it clears. But he doesn't see the wall—it is the living room of his own home—there is his mother sitting at the table, his step-father opposite her. They are smiling at each other.

The boy is tempted to cry out to his mother. But then the vision fades. He is back in the temple, on his stool, and the monks are smiling at him understandingly.

Was It Hypnotism?

"Hypnotism," say the skeptics. But was it hypnotism? Let this boy, now 76 years old, a successful scientist who was in New York a few months ago, tell you more.

"I stayed in that lamasery fourteen years and was educated in the ways of the world. Some mystic things were revealed to me, but I was given strict orders not to reveal to the world what I had learned of natural laws. I was commissioned to go forth in the world and make my own way and my fortune, with the understanding that I shall return when I am ninety and follow my education for many years to come. No—I am not a master, merely an apprentice. I look forward with eagerness to my higher studies.

"Those masters enjoy themselves far be-

yond the comprehension of the outside world. The whole world is their cinema. They can see and hear that which transpires in all corners of the Earth. Why should they leave their temple? They are not molested because they can restrain trespassers by thought power; and anyone approaching the temple who is not welcome, never reaches it. I have seen exploring caravans miles away, suddenly turn and trek to the east or west at the mere command of the monk who is watching them from the top of the temple. And no matter whether they are watching or not, they know immediately if some stranger puts foot on the ground within forty miles of their sacred reservation."

Astounding Traditions

Traditions of Tibet are astounding. Not all was calm and tranquil in ancient days when might was right and self-preservation allowed only the survival of the fittest. That was before man's written history—when even the Pyramids had not yet been conceived.

Still, in those days, according to legend, masters roved the hills of Tibet in roles that would belittle the great witch-doctors of tropic climes. They supposedly controlled the wind and the storm—powers credited only to gods of ancient mythology. Who knows but that mythology might have been inspired by reports which had trickled out of the mountains of the East, down through the hills of India into the plains of eastern Europe and northern Africa where "civilized" Egyptians, Greeks and Romans believed they were tales of the gods who lived in the sky?

Yes, there is some reason to believe that the gods of ancient history were counterparts of the Tibetan masters of Black Arts, the only survivors of a once great civilization aeons ago which was destroyed by flood covering the entire Earth except those few high peaks of Tibetan India. Why should that one section of the globe, even to this day, be the center of mysticism and magic?

In the hills and valleys of Tibet perhaps lie buried the secrets of a civilization far surpassing the material and scientific world of today. For at one time, man may have used the hidden powers of mind and spirit which our present civilization is prone to neglect.

The White Master

It might have happened ten thousand years ago, or it might have happened fifty thousand years beyond that—but there is one tradition which persists in Tibet today which even the lowliest peasant accepts as the truth of his ancestors.

It is this: that on a mountain top there once lived a white master who had power over the wind and the storm, the heat and the cold. He was extremely wealthy, but his fondest possession was a young son

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

whom he loved beyond all things in the world.

The people in the valley below feared the white master, but they were also jealous of his wealth and power. They paid homage to him because they knew he would send wind and storm and heat and cold if they did not conform to his orders.

The people were a savage lot—they fought among themselves, robbed and committed all manner of crimes. But the bravest bandit never dared to venture to the top of the mountain for fear of magic power which he could not overcome.

But one day the young son wandered too far down the side of the mountain. He was richly clothed with gold and precious stones, and when he had almost reached the valley he was seen by the lowland people.

His raiment was too much of a temptation and they forgot their fear of the father of the boy. They could rob him with ease and the father would not know who had done it.

So they silently surrounded the lad and closed in on him. They did not expect him to offer resistance, but when they grabbed for his clothing he tried to fight them off. But the son did not have the magic power of his father, so he was quickly subdued and left naked and unconscious on the side of the hill.

The people ran away, believing the lad would gain consciousness and return to his father's temple. But the cold of the night overcame the boy before he revived—and the next morning he was lying in sleep of death on the spot where they had attacked him.

The Father's Vengeance

The people were frightened. If the master found the body, he would take vengeance on them. They had to dispose of the body at once. So they built a huge fire and tossed the body into the flames.

But the smoke had evidently attracted the father, for when the people looked up, they saw the master standing at the crest of the hill just beyond.

Instantly there came a terrific gale of wind followed by rain which extinguished the fire. But it was too late—the lad's body was partially burned.

The people fell on their faces in terror. They could not move. Then slowly the father walked to the smoldering bier. He pulled his beloved son from the ashes and laid him tenderly on the ground. The people watched, awaiting their fate. They saw the horrible sight that grieved the father. One leg of the boy was burned black—the other leg roasted red. One arm was brown from scorching and the other arm yellow, for it had not touched the flame but was singed by the heat.

The father stood up and looked at the people. In savage tone he ordered them to carry the body up the mountain.

Instantly they obeyed. Four strong men lifted the body, while the rest of the mul-

(Continued on page 14)

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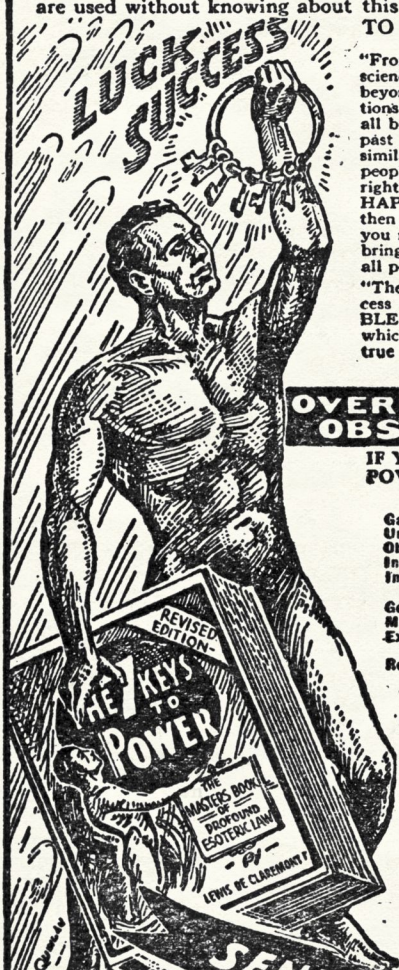

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THE BLACK ARTS

(Continued from page 12)

titude followed the funeral procession, the father walking behind them like a master driving slaves to their doom.

When they had reached the huge garden, the body was laid on the soft grass. Then the father ordered the people to stand beyond and to separate into four equal groups, north, east, south and west. They obeyed like puppets.

When they were arranged to the four corners of the body, the father approached the remains of his son. He withdrew a large sword from his belt and knelt down beside the dead body.

The Severed Limbs

Slowly, with the precision of a surgeon, he severed the arms and legs. One by one he picked up the limbs. He lifted the blackened leg and carried it to the group at the south. Then likewise, he took the reddened leg to the company at the west. The yellow arm went to the northern group and the brown arm to those in the east. He ordered one leader in each group to hold the limb.

Then he returned to the torso of his son and ordered two men to dig a grave. In that grave they buried what was left of the boy's body.

When the grave was covered with earth, and the sod had been placed over it, the father turned to the guilty people who awaited their doom.

As the master spoke, the thunder came and the lightning flashed, and when the people were thoroughly terrified, the father spoke with mighty voice which made the people tremble:

"You shall leave this place forever and travel to the far corners of the world in the directions which you are now pointed, north, east, south, west. The farther you go, the better for you all. You are now four tribes of wanderers. Each will carry with you the limb of my son. If you dispose of it, you shall die. Keep it as a shrine, your only hope for forgiveness. Not until it is wasted away entirely, will you cease your wanderings. And at that time, each of you will have taken on the color of that limb, some black, some red, some brown and some yellow, and your children will inherit that color. Go now, before the wrath of wind and storm has blown you from the mountain."

A Magic Grave

Such is the strange tradition which tells that the white master lived alone, until his orders had been obeyed and the entire world was covered by people of different color.

Then he left the mountain and went to a strange country of white people and was never seen again. But he had left one order behind him—that whosoever shall

(Continued on page 94)

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The Manci Curse

By DOROTHY QUICK

Author of "The Bag of Skin," "Strange Awakening," etc.

CHAPTER I

Siren of Venice

WE HAD come as far as Naples on Miss Parlon's tour for "a select group of girls." Four nights ago we had left Florence, four nights spent in different places, for Miss Parlon believed we should "do" Italy thoroughly. And, during this time, the jeweled belt that I had bought from the antique dealer in Florence was always around my waist, the sinister bag of skin which hung from it ever at my side.

It was as the shopkeeper who had sold it to me had said—I had taken the belt, knowing its history. I had to wear it—and the bag that held the Manci curse. If for one moment I was out of contact with it, pain—terrible, searing pain shot through me. Only when I touched the bag could I feel relief. That bag which had been concerned in a fantastic, almost incredible happening, which I had relived, or dreamed, the first night I had slept with the bag at my side. The next day I had gone back to the shopkeeper who had sold the bag to me.

A Complete Novelet

Alice Parker Lives Anew the Peril of Past Ages, the Gruesome Mystery of Walking Cadavers and the Evil Sorcery of a Demoniac Siren!

There stood what was left of Edmund, Lord of Ayour

and he had shown me an ancient manuscript from which he had read, then given it to me.

For myself, I had read how the Manci curse had survived the ages, and known that I must truly "wear the belt and bag" until I sold it to someone else who *really* wanted it, as the manuscript had disclosed.

Sheila, my roommate on the tour, was as fascinated with the bag as I had been on my first sight of it in the shop in Florence, but I wouldn't sell it to her, for I wanted to know about the adventures and experiences of others who had owned the bag. For an ancient manuscript the shopkeeper had given me promised that whoever wore the bag would know them all, and the dream I had dreamed, or the adventures I had relived when I felt myself to be part of a young man in Naples, in a long-gone day, had not been finished.

It was this that enabled me to put up with the inconvenience of constantly wearing the bag of skin day and night, as well as the ghastly feeling of a hand always resting upon me. For to touch the bag was like touching human skin! But, despite bearing all this, four nights had passed and I had had no further adventure into the past, no dream of ancient happenings.

I WAS disappointed, for I inherited my father's nature. His impatience and unwillingness to wait for things to happen made him forge ahead and *make* them happen until he became *the* Cyrus I. Parker, tycoon of aviation. I, Alice Parker, had always been like him. I couldn't bear to wait for anything, and as I stood on the balcony looking out over the bay of Naples to Vesuvius throwing fiery sparks into a pure cobalt sky, I decided that tomorrow I would sell the belt and its sinister appendage to Sheila.

I had hardly formed the idea in my mind when I felt the bag at my side move, and the sensation of a hand resting on my hip deepened. I could almost feel fingers pressing into my skin through the soft folds of my dress.

Even the beauty of the scene couldn't keep me from shivering. From far below came a voice, rich and golden, reminiscent of Caruso's, pouring music into the night. Surely nothing evil could be present, surrounded as I was with beauty. And yet the sensation of fingers digging into me persisted.

I was glad when Sheila came out on the balcony.

"We're going to be here a week," she complained. "Do you have to get all the atmosphere this minute? I'm tired and I can't sleep until the lights are out."

"You can't turn that out," I said, as I pointed to the distant volcano, "but you can switch off the electric one. There's enough light from the moon for me to undress by."

Actually I was glad of an excuse to undress in the dark. It had required considerable maneuvering to prevent Sheila from seeing I wore the belt at night, which I had to do, if I would be free from excruciating agony. But I couldn't explain to Sheila, who was a prospective customer, about that swift, terrible pain I would suffer if I did not wear the belt and bag constantly.

Sheila was asleep long before I got into my own bed. I slid quietly between my covers so as not to disturb her. As I pulled up the sheet my hand came in contact with the bag of skin. Once more I had the curious sensation of another hand touching mine.

With it came a lethargic sensation of drifting into blackness. For a few seconds I knew nothing, and then light was beating through my eyelids —thousands of twinkling lights.

When I opened my eyes I was no longer in my hotel room, nor in my comfortable bed. I was standing stiff

and straight in a large square room hung with beautiful tapestries, lit by candelabra of all sizes. There must have been hundreds of candles burning in that chamber, and they sent forth myriad beams that threw the countenances of the people there into high relief.

I was no longer Alice Parker, except in my thoughts. Once more I was adventuring into the past, and my spirit was inhabiting another body, or else I was dreaming that it did.

This time I was not a man as I had been in my first dream when I had felt myself a part of Edmund, Lord of Ayour. I was a girl, young and lovely, with great masses of chestnut-colored hair bound in a golden net, and a strange medieval gown of green brocade.

MY FACE was white and sad. I could see my reflection in a large silver-framed mirror which was set on a low, carved table directly opposite me. I could also see the face of the young man beside me, and he was holding my hand so tightly that it hurt. He was dark and handsome, but his face was etched with sorrow, though he seemed a man born for happiness. Somehow his countenance seemed vaguely familiar, yet I knew I had never seen him before.

I looked away from the mirror, and let my eyes travel around the room. In a high-backed chair in the far corner an ancient woman, plainly dressed, sat sobbing quietly. Two elegantly attired elderly men stood by the table which held the mirror. Their expressions were mournful, too.

My gaze now centered on the huge bed in the room. It had great carved, gilded posts and a canopy of crimson velvet. The headboard was covered with the velvet too, and in its center, embroidered in gold, was a coat of arms.

A man was lying on the bed, a tall, thin man with a shock of white hair, whose shrivelled hand lay limp upon the damask that covered him. Yet he was not dead. The damask rose and fell with slow regularity.

Despite the white hair and the ravages of time, I recognized Edmund, Lord of Ayour. That same man who, in my first adventure, had brought the curse upon him and his house.

Now I knew why the face of the

THE HERITAGE OF THE MANCIS

TO DREAM or not to dream—that was the question born of the curse of the Manci, as told in "The Bag of Skin" to which this story is a sequel.

In the shadows of the Rialto, in Florence, Alice Parker, a touring American girl, found a curio which was destined to hurl her back into the dim and distant past—a jeweled belt to which was attached a bag which felt as if it were made of human skin. It *was* human skin, as Alice learned when in dreams she was transported back through the centuries to watch the grim unfolding of a tragedy in which Edmund, Lord of Ayour, brought down the curse of the beautiful Venetian siren, Beatrice Manci, when he saved Carlos Gianchini, fiancé of his sister, Fiametta, from the Manci's clutches.

Tearing the mask from her face, he revealed her as a horrible witch. For revenge, the Manci put a curse on Edmund and his sons through the ages, condemning him as long as he lived to wear the bag of skin that had made the witch eerily beautiful, or suffer untold agony.

Three centuries ago that was—and the bag of skin still held its potency, as Alice Parker discovered. Should she sell the bag and jeweled belt, as its written history said she might to someone who "really wanted it," or should she keep it and dream again? This story is her answer—the story of sorcery's eternal lure.

young man beside me had seemed familiar. He was very like the Edmund of whom I had, for a brief voyage back into time, been a part.

Beside the bed a woman was kneeling, her face buried in the damask. Near her stood another man I oddly recognized, and knew to be that Carlos Gianchini for whom, and for his own sister Fiametta's sake, Edmund had incurred the curse. Carlos still retained the good looks I remembered, though time had blurred their outlines.

The young man next to me sighed. The girl, who strangely enough was myself, leaned closer to him. I could not think of her as myself, though, but only as of another of whom I was a part.

"Guido, you must not grieve so," she whispered. "Your father has had a long and happy life. He dies in peace."

"I have shed my tears for him long since, Sancia—ever since his seizure three days ago. I am resigned to his loss. This time I sighed for myself." Guido's face fell further. "I had that dream again last night."

Sancia caught her breath and had to overcome the wild beating of her heart before she spoke.

"Again! Oh, Guido, I do not like your dreams."

"Nor I, *Madonna*. When we are wed and I can clasp you in my arms your beauty will drive away the dream and make that other beauty less." There was no confidence in Guido's voice, though his words were bold.

Sancia pressed closer. "Tell me this dream. Was it the same as the others?"

"The same and yet a little different. You know how often I have gone to sleep, dreaming of you, Sancia, my bride-to-be, and then the dream changes and someone takes your place—a woman with a beauty that is not of earth, a loveliness that is almost as unbearable to see, just as you can hardly bear to hear some notes of the violin because the vibration is so intense. In my dreams this woman's beauty is like that and she fills me with desire—the desire to hold her in my arms."

SANCIA shivered and her hand lay slack in Guido's.

"My love for you remains unaltered, Sancia," he said fervently. "It is a pure candle burning forever in my heart. This other is a will-o'-the-wisp. When you are mine this dream will go—I am sure of it."

"I pray so for both our sakes," the girl said. "Go on, Guido, tell me more of your dreams. I hate them, yet I have to know."

"I should not have told you of them—would not, had you not found me in the garden lost in one of them and heard me call another's name. Then I had to tell you."

"Yes, Guido, you had to tell me, and it is better that I know. Go on." She tightened her hand in his again.

"She eludes me in the dream, this vision of loveliness, tantalizes me, but ever promises that some day she will be mine. In my dreams I want her more than anything in the world, this woman I know as Beatrice, yet I hate myself for wanting her, for all the while I know it is you I really love. But last night—last night she almost made me forget. She touched my face with her hand and it was as though a thousand fires started within my veins. But as she drew still nearer an unspeakable revulsion came over me that dampened the fires like a blast of cold air, or a breath from a tomb.

"I cried out, 'Go, Beatrice, go! Never come back to haunt me again!' Then it seemed to me that she became a fury. 'You fool!' she cried. 'To think that you can bid me go. Know that soon you will be wholly mine. Have I not touched you and started the flame of undying desire within your breast that only I can satisfy?'

"I looked straight into her eyes boldly, as I had never done before, and answered her. 'The fires flared

only for a moment.' I told her. 'I am not yours, nor ever will be!' And, Sancia, for just that second it seemed as though my father stood beside me and the words I spoke were his, not mine."

"This is the strangest dream of all." Sancia was so intent that, without knowing, she spoke aloud.

Guido, too, had forgotten his hushed whisper as he went on.

"Then she began to laugh," he said. "'So you fight me again as you lie dying, Edmund, but you cannot save him—you, nor anyone else!' she defied me. 'I take what I will, and my curse endures forever!' Then I woke up, Sancia. But I was trembling and exhausted by my brain's turmoil. Oh, most truly do I dread the night, and that beautiful, fiendish vision!"

"My son."

The voice came from the bed. Guido loosened Sancia's hand and ran to the sick man.

"Father! Father! They said you would not speak again."

There was a faint smile on the dying Edmund's lips. "Doctors have not all wisdom, son. Fiametta"—his thin hand touched the kneeling woman—"weep not. Death is but the opening of a door, the going into a new world, a free world. Rejoice at my release from all care, and my reunion with my beloved wife, Juliet."

Fiametta touched her lips to his hand.

"As you will, brother!" She rose, and Carlos Gianchini stepped forward.

Edmund stopped him. "Wait, Carlos, and listen. What I have to say touches us all. Guido, I heard what you told just now of your dreams. Why have you never spoken to me of them?"

"I did not think to bother you." Guido took Fiametta's place by the bed.

"Sancia, come hither," Edmund called, his voice stronger. "Are you willing to wed Guido here and now?"

The girl's answer came unfalteringly. "It would be gaining my heart's dearest wish, my lord."

EDMUND turned his eyes toward the two men standing by the table.

"And you, Lorenzo, do you object to the advancing of your daughter's wedding?"

"No. If Sancia does not mind missing all the fripperies a wedding means in our house, I will be glad, and add that much more to her dowry."

"Which I charge Guido to double," said Edmund. "Send for the priest. Let him come hither with book and bell. Go, my old nurse, and fetch Father Ambrose."

The ancient woman literally ran from the room.

"Now," said Edmund, whose tones were weaker, "I want Carlos to tell you the story of the Manci."

Carlos Gianchini obeyed. "The Manci was a witch in Venice who lured men to her palace by her beauty. They gave their all to her in hopes of receiving her favors, but she only stripped them bare and gave nothing in return—but death. I loved Fiametta, yet I could not resist the Manci. I went often to her palace and gave her half the Gianchini fortune. Then Edmund came to rescue me—for Fiametta's sake. Because of the great love he bore for Juliet, his wife, he was able to resist the Manci. He intended to mar her beauty to save me and other men, but when his sword pricked her face, it tore the skin away, and revealed unutterable horror underneath."

Carlos crossed himself and shivered.

"All her beauty had been false. The Manci had worn a mask! A mask of skin! She cursed Edmund and said that what he had taken he must keep, he and his house forever. Then she disappeared from Venice, though no man saw her go, and Edmund found she had cursed well, for he could not separate himself from the mask with-

out unbearable pain. So he had it made into a bag and wore it constantly."

"And still do," Edmund said weakly, and took up the tale. "Bury it with me, Guido, it and the jeweled belt it hangs upon. Yet, hear this, Guido, for of a truth your words have brought me back from death itself to tell you. The Manci was a woman such as you describe visits you in your dream, and her name was Beatrice!"

CHAPTER II

Return from the Grave

EDMUND, Lord of Ayour's statement fell like a bomb. But without giving anyone time to recover he went on.

"While I lay here in a coma it seemed to me that I met and fought the Manci just as Guido described. I thought it was a dream, but now I am not sure. She said that night in Venice that she would come again, and I fear for you, my son.

"Beatrice Manci panders to that side in man which is pure animal, and the passions she arouses are impious, terrible things like the will-o'-the-wisp that leads one onto the quicksands. Together you and Sancia can fight her. That is why I wish you to be wedded now for, alone, without a star to guide his course, no man can keep away from the quicksands of shame and death toward which the Manci will lead him. If Sancia be your star, Guido, I die content, but if she fears, or if you, Lorenzo, fear for her, then I will understand."

"I fear—but would still be Guido's wife" Sancia said.

"I fear no ghost, nor the phantom power of an incredible creature," Lorenzo announced sonorously.

The part of me that was Alice Parker wanted to tell him he was a fool. In my first dream I had seen Beatrice Manci in the full flower of her masked beauty back in Venice when I had been part of Edmund, just as I was now part of Sancia. I knew of the Manci curse, and knew it had survived even to my own time as Alice Parker.

I had the bag that held the Manci curse now. I had to wear it. In the history I had read, it had said that the Manci had boasted that there were other masks than the one Edmund, Lord of Ayour, had torn from her. Would she wear another? And, even knowing there was corruption underneath, even wth Sancia's help, could Guido withstand that evil beauty? I feared it, and I wanted to cry out to them that they were all fools, but I could not. The part of me that was Alice Parker could only observe what went on.

The door opened, the priest came in. Sancia and Guido stood together by the bed and the marriage service began. Edmund lay watching, smiling happily. When it was over he kissed the bride and groom and gave them his blessing.

"Now truly I die content for I am sure—"

The words faded back into his throat, his eyes grew wide, and he pulled himself up in bed as though he were listening. Everyone watched him, but so great was the tension no one moved.

"No—no—*no!*" he screamed, suddenly, and pushed empty space away from him with his hands. "No, it shall not be!" He addressed the air with wildly staring eyes.

Then I heard a laugh, remindful of a sudden shower of apple blossoms drifting across the atmosphere, musical and beautiful as the sound of water bubbling over crystal stones. Edmund and Carlos heard it too, and horror stamped itself upon their pallid faces.

"Bury me deep!" Edmund cried, and fell back.

"That was Beatrice Manci's laugh," Carlos half whispered.

The priest began the prayer for the dead. Everyone in the room sank to their knees. This time the spirit of Edmund, Lord of Ayour, had truly gone beyond human reach. . . .

"BURY me deep," Edmund had said.

The family vault seemed deep enough, so with great ceremony Edmund was laid to rest in it. Guido did not even look at the bag of skin or the jeweled belt his dead father wore. He did not even try to see his father again, but told Carlos and Lorenzo to be certain the bag was buried with Edmund and that the coffin was sealed tight within the vault.

Then the great iron gates of the mausoleum in the cemetery outside of Naples were locked. Guido put the keys into his strong box.

Guido said good-by to his aunt and uncle, for Fiametta and Carlos had only come from Venice on account of Edmund's illness. Before he went Carlos explained to Guido why Edmund had left Venice when he married.

"Your mother, Juliet, came from Naples, and Edmund said the air in Venice whispered of the Manci, so he was glad to leave it and make his home in Naples."

"Naples is my home too," said Guido stoutly. "Sancia and I will stay here and find happiness."

"If you want company we will come to you at any time," Fiametta interposed sweetly, and then with handclasps and kisses, the Gianchinis rode away. Lorenzo, Sancia's father, put an arm about Guido and his daughter.

"So, my children, you are now alone in the great Ayour Palace, with old Maria to look after you, but I am nearby. We will see each other often, and if you need me I will come. Tell me, son Guido, have you had that dream again?"

"No." Guido smiled into Sancia's eyes. "Since I have married Sancia I have not dreamed at all."

"Good—good!" Lorenzo snapped his fingers. "Know, son, I have no faith in curses, nor do I think the Manci visited you in dreams. You were over-young and over-wrought with love. I give you a little time to recover from your father's loss, and then I will take you and Sancia to court. You will find the king ready to favor you, Guido, for your father's sake and mine. And you must take the place in affairs to which your rank and fortune entitle you."

"I would be glad to meet your will, sir."

Guido and his father-in-law clasped hands, and then, after kissing his daughter, the older man departed. Guido and Sancia stood on the terrace.

"My life," he said, and caught her in his arms.

Sancia touched his face gently. "My lord, my love. True happiness is ours."

They walked into the palace confident of the future.

But I, Alice Parker, did not share their emotion. I was afraid, of just what I did not know, but I believed in the Manci curse and I was sure that some evil would be bound to come. . . .

THE first warning that came passed over the heads of the young couple lightly.

When a man came from the cemetery to say that there were strange noises emanating from the Ayour tomb, Guido shook his head.

"An animal inside, perhaps."

"I think not, lord. The carvings of the door are small. There is no place a cat or dog could squeeze through."

"Well then, a snake. That would account for the rustling you describe."

"Perhaps. But will you not come and bring the keys so we may look?"

"No!" Sancia cried, surprising everyone with her vehemence. The part of her that was me, felt her terror.

Guido put his hand on hers.

"We will not go, nor send the keys," he said, forestalling the man's suggestion. "My father's bones will rest in peace. You have seen nothing when you have looked within through the grille, man, so there is nothing there, unless it be a snake or something like. Whatever it is, the iron doors are strong and they will keep it in."

So the man went away.

But that night, for the first time in the month they had been married, Guido dreamed of the Manci. There was no seduction in her voice. She only gazed solemnly on him and asked, "Where is the bag you should be wearing?"

Guido, looking into her eyes, was suddenly aware that all beauty was built upon a skull, and the thought was horrible. The thought beat in upon him that even beneath the softness of Sancia's honey-colored skin were the grim outlines of the bony structure. He awoke trembling.

Sancia instantly knew what had happened.

"No—no, my dearest," she soothed. "It was not the Manci. You dreamed tonight because all that talk of tombs turned your mind back to such things. Feel the soft breeze coming from Sorrento caressing us. In it there is no evil. Let us go out on the balcony and look at the moon shining on the bay."

They wrapped themselves in their velvet chamber robes and went out on the balcony as she had suggested. As they reached it, a shower of laughter sprayed around their heads.

"Someone is merry down below," Guido said.

"Yes, my lord, merry as we," Sancia answered.

But her heart was like ice within her breast. For she knew that she had heard that laugh before—when Edmund, Lord of Ayour, had died!

Months went by. Several times reports came from the cemetery of the strange noises which were daily growing louder, and less understandable. There were requests to investigate the Ayour mausoleum, but these Guido, prompted by Sancia, denied. Rumors flew about and people shunned the tomb even by daylight, for they said it was haunted.

Guido dreamed often now, but in these dreams there was no cause for Sancia's jealousy. They were all of the bag made of the skin that his father had torn from the face of the Manci. The dreams were insistent that he get the bag, wear the bag. Finally the beautiful vision threw her head back in triumph and announced:

"You will wear the bag soon—closer than your father, because all this time you have defied me."

AFTER that Guido's sleep was not disturbed again and he was overjoyed.

"I'm free of her at last, Sancia," he cried.

Sancia smiled with him, but her heart was heavy. She did not share Guido's opinion, and she felt that she must hold her love and happiness fast with both hands or she would lose it.

A few days later, as Sancia was begging Guido to take her on a trip, her father came into the room.

"Well, my children," he said cheerily, "we have had good news. You are bid to court, Guido, tomorrow at noon. For your private ear, the king is going to give you an important appointment."

Sancia clapped her hands and Guido cried out that indeed he was most favored. The words had hardly left his lips when there came a scream and pattering footsteps up the marble stair.

The old nurse Maria rushed into the room and clasped Guido in her arms.

"Oh, my lord, my lord!" she panted. "There came a man from the cemetery who says the iron doors of the tomb are burst asunder. Your father's grave is wide open and your father's corpse walks hither."

"Please, woman, shut your foolish

mouth. No one could credit such a tale." Lorenzo spoke sternly.

"Nurse"—Guido was kind—"these things could not be."

Sancia ignored them both. "Did someone see Lord Edmund?"

"Aye, lady." Maria turned to her mistress, while both men stared at Sancia as though she had suddenly taken leave of her wits. "For weeks now no one has gone near the tomb, because of the sounds and rumors of hauntings. But when they saw the terrible figure walk out of the cemetery, they looked, and what I have said is true. The vault is open, the coffin empty, the gates are broken. A man ran hither to report to us. As he came he passed the corpse still wearing the velvet suit we buried my lord in, walking slowly this way, each step

seemingly a prodigious effort, and, although the velvet of the suit is rotted and the face and hands much altered, the bag of skin still hangs by his side."

"You will wear the bag, Guido!" Sancia's voice was shrill. "*She* said so in your dream, Guido, and now it seems you must."

"Daughter, you are crazed!" Lorenzo caught her arm.

"No, Father! Would to all the saints I were!"

"I fear too—terribly—" Guido said.

"Well, I do not." Lorenzo was sharp. "This is a pack of lies. Listen to those fellows scream below now that they have heard it. I'll talk sense to them."

He started for the door and then stopped, stricken dumb by what he saw. For there, between the marble columns, stood what was left of Edmund, Lord of Ayour.

CHAPTER III

The Heritage

I CANNOT describe it—I will not. There are some things too horrible to be written down. A zombie is a walking corpse but, though there is no soul within, its body is at least unmarred. This hideous travesty standing in the doorway was a gruesome combination of bone and flesh which had lost all semblance to humanity, yet there was in it an appeal and a pathos that went straight to the hearts of its observers.

No sound could issue from lips that were not there, but the figure held out pitiful bony hands, and no one could doubt what was meant. As though they were spoken, words were branded on Sancia's soul.

"Take the bag and let me rest in peace. A force beyond my choosing drove me here, made me break down the bars so I could come. Give relief to my torture. Take the bag."

"You have no choice now, Guido," Sancia quavered.

The odor of the tomb was in her nostrils, pressing its noisome vapors into her brain.

"By all the saints, had I not seen I could not have believed!" Lorenzo, that proud disbeliever in curses sank on his knees. "Edmund, my friend, I pray you go—back to your tomb! Leave your unhappy son."

Once again a wordless message greeted them.

"I cannot go unless—"

"I will take the bag—I will take the bag!"

Guido walked forward, his face whiter than the bone of his father's hand. Sancia said nothing. She was waiting for the Manci's laugh. She knew that it would come.

Guido's fingers fumbled with the clasp of the jeweled belt, took it from

that terrible figure. As he did so the strings that held the bag shut loosened and the bag gaped wide open.

Guido held the belt and retreated away from the figure in the doorway, gasping for air, as a drowning man does when he comes to the water's surface for the last time.

Once more a message reached them.

"Touch the bag—you must touch the bag."

With his left hand Guido reached down toward it blindly, for he could hardly see. In doing so his hand went into the bag and at that moment the strings jerked shut so that his hand was inside the bag as a boxers is inside his glove.

"Look!" Sancia screamed.

There was no longer any figure standing in the doorway. Instead there was a putrescent mass on the floor.

Sancia felt something snap in her brain. She had had too much horror. She even welcomed the faintness that was descending upon her. But before she entirely lost consciousness she heard that sound she had been dreading—the tinkling music of the Manci's laugh. . . .

Before Sancia finally came to her senses the pitiful remains of Edmund, Lord of Ayour, had been reburied, and the work of reparation of the tomb was well under way.

Sancia opened her eyes to see Guido and her father sitting beside her bag.

"My lord"—she put her hand in her husband's—"what happened after I fainted?"

"Guido also collapsed and I was no use, but Maria sent for the doctor," Lorenzo answered. "He attended to us all, and tried—"

"How do you feel, beloved?" Guido interrupted his father-in-law.

SANCIA knew that he would never have done this without good reason. With Guido, respect for his elders was an instinct. She turned to face her husband.

"What did the doctor try, Guido?"

Her father started to speak, but Guido drew himself up.

"Nay, sir, there is no use. It is something she has to know, therefore it is better that she face it now."

At that moment Sancia realized her husband was no longer a youth. He had become a man, and was taking a man's place in the world. Self-reliant and assured he was now, though the cost had been dear.

"Tell me quickly, my lord," she begged, little guessing that its spectre would be with her for the rest of her life. "Suspense is more than I can bear."

Guido held up his left arm. The hand was still covered by the bag of skin, and looked for all the world like that of a boxer on his entrance to the ring.

"It won't come off, Sancia," he said simply. "We have tried everything."

"But surely—" Sancia began.

"The strength of your father, of the doctor and two serving men could not loosen it, though while they struggled it seemed as though I would die of agony. Then the doctor took his lancet and slit the stuff, but the rest of it clung to my hand and they could not pull it away. Then, before our very eyes, the bag joined itself together again.

"Finally the doctor tried a strong acid on one corner and it made no impression, though when the bag shivered and threw the acid on the floor, the stuff burned through the carpet. There is no way that it can be removed unless I have my hand cut off, and I am not sure I coud bear the pain that separation from the accursed thing would inflict upon me. I have taken the bag. I must wear the bag."

His eyes had sunken deep into their sockets, from which they gleamed feverishly.

"Then we must face it." Sancia spoke bravely.

"But promise me one thing, Sancia —and you, too, Lorenzo," Guido

begged. "If I—should die—that someone will take the bag. I could not bear that you should see me, my loved ones, as we saw my father. That fear would haunt me day and night." He shivered. "So promise, for my peace of mind."

"I promise." Sancia forced a smile. "For myself—and for our son."

Not so had she meant to tell him of the new life under her heart, but she realized that he must have something to distract his mind, and knew that joy is the greatest panacea in the world.

"My life!" He clasped her close and buried his head in her soft hair.

"'The sins of the father,'" groaned Lorenzo. "And yet Edmund did not sin. I find here no allegory. He conquered something evil for the sake of good, and brought a curse upon himself and his house. Does it mean that evil cannot be wholly vanquished? That some part of it exists forever in the heart of man, and that only through expiation and suffering can men come to complete good? Here is a riddle I, for one, cannot answer."

SANCIA pressed her husband closer to her.

"There are some things that cannot be answered—doors which, in life, cannot be opened," she murmured. "Perhaps one has swung aside a little and we have glimpsed such horror on the other side that we will look no more. What hour is it, and what day?"

"It is noon, and the day is Thursday," Guido answered. "Let it be written down in the annals of the Ayours that this day has brought me much happiness."

"Is it not that same day we were bid to court?"

"Aye, Daughter, but I thought—" began Lorenzo.

"We will not think of anything but the present from now on." Sancia raised herself in bed and spoke eagerly. "We live for the moment, and that moment is good. We will go to court. Tell me, Guido, does that—that thing on your hand hurt?"

"No. Strangely enough, though it clings so close, I feel nothing. In fact there is no sensation in my hand at all, except that I am aware of the bag adhering almost as though it were a caress. But how can I explain—" He broke off suddenly.

"You did yourself a hurt, and cover it so. There may be some talk abroad about your father, Guido. Not much, for our servants are loyal, but the men in the cemetery will speak."

"I think not," Lorenzo interrupted. "I have bought their silence."

[*Turn page*]

"Then all is well. We will speak no more of this. You will put your arm in a sling to go to court, Guido, and say you hurt your hand in a fall from a new horse that you were breaking. Go now and dress in your best garments. Help him, Father, and send Maria to me."

WHEN the men had gone, Sancia sat silent in the great bed. She was very young, only sixteen, yet she felt as though centuries lay heavily upon her and the wisdom of the ages was hers. She had known sorrow and horror, and something told her she was not yet done with either.

In her ears still echoed the Manci's laugh, and in her eyes was the vision of her husband's hand, wrapped in what had been the Manci's laugh, and she knew the end of the story was yet to come. As to what it would be she had no prescience to tell her, but she would meet it when the time came.

Until then she and Guido would live each moment for what it held, and drink deep of whatever happiness they could, and when the child came . . . But even in her thoughts she could not face the realization of what the Manci curse might mean to the child. . . .

The trip to court was all Lorenzo had promised. Ferdinand, King of Naples, was most kind to Guido and appointed him Master of the Robes, which meant much honor and a continual place at court for both Guido and Sancia. Moreover, the Queen took a liking to Sancia immediately and said she would be godmother to her first child. Sancia, amid much confusion, admitted she would be claiming fulfillment of the pledge soon, and the king presented her with a ruby ring from his own finger.

There was no cloud on their horizon except the inverted bag on Guido's hand and the fear that he might dream again. But he swore that the bag bothered him not at all, and the Manci did not appear in his dreams.

Sancia believed him for, at first, he slept the deep sleep of exhaustion in her arms, and eventually the sleep of utter content. As the days went on they forgot the Manci, and grew so accustomed to the bag covering Guido's hand that it became commonplace. Indeed everywhere it was accepted so, and Guido managed as well with one hand as most people do with two.

When the child was born Guido rejoiced much over its beauty. Baby Lorenzo, they called him, for Sancia's father, and he resembled nothing less than one of the cherubs that a master's hand had painted on the ceiling of the king's throne room. His skin was pink and white like Sancia's, his hair as golden, and his eyes were blacker than Guido's—an arresting combination. Everyone exclaimed that there had never been so lovely a child.

Sancia recovered quickly, and the queen kept her promise and was godmother, the king godfather, for His Majesty insisted he would not be slighted and bestowed the title of count upon the baby, which ordinarily he would not have had while his father lived.

In all this time life was so normal that the ever-present dread in Sancia's heart quieted until at last she, too, slept peacefully at night and greeted each new day without wondering if a blow would fall. Her happiness was complete.

Only I, Alice Parker, the part of her of which she was unaware, feared for her all the more, because I knew that underneath the pleasant waters she sailed upon were dark currents eddying with a violence that might come to the surface at any time. How or when I had no idea, but I was sure that it would come, just as I had been sure that other time.

When little Lorenzo was ten months old, Maria brought him to his mother.

"See, *Madonna,* he walks alone. Stretch out your arms for him and he will come."

Sancia knelt and held out her hands. Surely enough the baby toddled away from Maria's ancient fingers and grasped his mother's.

"My sweet lamb," she caroled. "Your father must see this."

She picked up the laughing, crowing child and ran out onto the terrace, where Guido sat puzzling over some plate documents.

"Guido—Guido!" she called. "Look! Our son walks. Hold out your arms for him."

She set the baby down, steadied him against her lovingly, holding his little hands.

Lorenzo crowed in the ecstatic way that babies have, eager to show off his new accomplishment. His father held out his arms and, as Sancia loosed her hold, Lorenzo paddled toward Guido.

At that moment the blood in Sancia's veins turned to ice, a deathly feeling caught at her middle—a wave of sick horror. For as Guido held out his arms for his little son she saw that the left, which bore the bag of skin, was a full four inches shorter than the right!

SHE had hardly time to grasp the hideousness of the situation when Guido caught the child in his arms and began exclaiming over "their little man."

"Truly, Sancia," he said happily, "our Lorenzo will bring great credit to the name of Ayour."

There was ice in Sancia's veins, a cold greater than any she had ever known flowing through her body. She was sure that she would never again feel the quick pulsations of warm, rich, human blood. But at least Guido was as yet unaware of what had happened. He was romping and playing with Lorenzo, quite unconscious of the doom that menaced him.

The child's hair was spun gold against the dark green velvet of Guido's coat. But the brightness was not for Sancia. At last the thought she had stifled so long had burst its bonds and faced her, grim as a death's head.

If anything happened to Guido, the Manci curse would come to their child! Unless, in some way, she could take it from him.

CHAPTER IV

For All Eternity

FOR the few months before Guido noticed the difference, Sancia hid the terror in her heart for his sake. But when, one day, she found him in his study with his arms outstretched, gazing at the left which was now a full hand shorter than the right, she saw by his horror-stricken expession that he knew.

She dropped down beside him, placing her head on his knee.

"Do not try to hide it from me, my darling," she murmured, "for I have known these three months past."

"It was only just now when I rested my arms on the table's edge that I noticed," he said slowly. "The thing is eating its way up my arm."

Guido made the ghastly statement in a flat, resigned voice in which there was no hope.

The icy numbness that held Sancia shivered as though it were part of a great ice flow striving to crack.

"There must be some way," she cried. "Truly, Guido, it would be better to sacrifice your arm to the knife than lose it so."

Guido rested his sad eyes on Sancia.

"It is best that we face facts, my life. We tried in every way to loosen this thing, and it could not be done. Moreover, when the bag was cut it repaired itself in but a few minutes. It —or the Manci behind it—has power greater than we know, beyond anything we can understand. But because we cannot comprehend it we have no reason to deny its existence. In fact

we can affirm that power. We saw what it did to my father."

He shuddered, and it was moments before he could go on.

"We know what it is doing to me," he said then. "If I had my arm cut off, I would die from the operation—our surgeons are none too skillful—or I would perish of the agony that separation from the accursed thing would inflict upon me. You have no idea, Sancia, the unbearable agony I suffer when it was pulled even so little away. The third alternative is that, just as it joined itself together again, so would it fasten itself upon me.

"As it is I suffer no pain, only a curious, caressing, nibbling sensation. And as for the rest—well, all men must die, Sancia. If not one way, then another. Only remember, I pray you, your promise that you will deliver me to true death, not let this unholy thing"—he lifted up the arm with its glovelike ending—"bring me forth from the tomb as it did my beloved father!"

"Did I not promise—for myself and for our child?" she asked softly.

The sadness deepened on Guido's face.

"It were better he had not been born and yet, Sancia, it would be easier for him in his youth to wear the bag than to see me as I saw—"

Guido's voice broke, and once more he buried his face on Sancia's shoulder for comfort.

"We may yet find some way," she soothed. "Besides, Guido, should you lose your arm that does not necessarily mean you die!"

"No, my life," Guido answered, but there was no conviction in his tones.

They clung together as though they thought they might be separated that very moment. Sancia decided she would take the bag herself when the time came, but of this she said nothing to Guido.

The thing made slow progress. Little Lorenzo was five before the bag rested tight about Guido's elbow. When the child was ten it had reached the shoulder, unnoticed by any save Guido and Sancia, for she arranged his clothes so that the gradual diminishing of his arm was not apparent. But the faint hope that the thing would be content with taking Guido's left arm died as it continued on up his shoulder until it fastened like a great growth upon his neck, leaving a skinless trail behind it.

GUIDO gave up his post at court, for the thing was beyond explaining, and he grew too weak to go about. He kept to his room, refusing to see anyone but Sancia and old Maria. Sancia's father had died a few years back, leaving his vast estates to little Lorenzo. The child was allowed to come to his father's room at certain times when Guido wore a scarf draped about his neck to hide the bag from the youngster's sight.

Guido and Sancia were even closer now, for both knew, although they had not put it into words, that their time together was short. Sancia's frantic efforts to find a way to combat the Manci curse had proved no hindrance to the terrible progress of the bag even though Guido, at her insistence, permitted the doctor to repeat all his former efforts, as well as some new ones. As a last resort Sancia had tried to have it exorcised.

One night Guido woke Sancia abruptly.

"Sancia, my life, I have but now dreamed of the Manci."

His voice was so faint she could hardly hear.

"By all the saints," his wife moaned, "has she not wrought enough misery that she comes—"

"Hush! This time I see some hope in it. No, not for me, but for my child. Listen, Sancia, while I have strength to speak, for this thing drains my life's blood and I grow weaker—"

Sancia knew he did not speak even half the truth. Already he had grown

thin and white until there was not a particle of color about him.

"In my dream," he whispered, "the Manci came to me and she was still beautiful, Sancia, with a beauty beyond telling. Yet, as before, I felt the horror beneath and I drew back. She looked at me like some avenging fury. Her voice was softer than the breeze from Amalfi, and as flower-laden.

"'Well, Guido, Lord of Ayour,' she said, 'you have paid in your body's torture and your mind's agony for defying me. No woman ever forgives a man who sees through her, and I am all woman. So you have suffered more than your father, for he had been warned against me, so there was more excuse for him. And Sancia, who stood in my path, has suffered too—and I have relished every pang, just as I relish your life's blood. For, Guido, I tell you this—I am one who must have everything and, because of that love you bore for Sancia, I could never touch your heart.

"'Soon you will be free of me and the bag that was once my mask, that little part of me that still exists in your portion of the earth. But remember, Guido, as you die, that the bag must be taken by an Ayour, for my curse is a real and potent thing, and lives forever, just as I do—but elsewhere than you know. I bid you farewell, Guido, I do not forgive you your defiance, nor for that love which sets you free and gives you to another for all eternity!'

"Then, Sancia, she leaned over to kiss me, and that was most horrible of all. For when she touched me, it was as though I felt the bony structure of a skull, as though the sweetly curved lips I had seen were not really there at all."

SANCIA shivered, and the icy numbness pressed against her heart until the pain was a real and tangible thing.

"But in this I see no hope," she whispered faintly.

"Yet it is there. Did she not say I had suffered more than my father, for he had been warned against her, whereas I, unwarned, resisted her because of my love for you? In this I find hope. You have been planning to take the bag yourself. I have read it in your mind. The Manci knew it, too, and said that it would do no good. No, Sancia, let Lorenzo take the bag when I am dead, but be sure he only touches the outside of it as my father did. Then he can wear it throughout his whole life without injury. I have written a true account of all this in a leather-bound book in my study. Let him read that and beware, and if the Manci comes to him in dreams, let him pretend to worship her, even though he keeps his soul clean within him. And you, Sancia, see that, for awhile at least, he does not fall in love."

"All this I will do," she promised, "and I give over my plan. For now I, too, see hope, my husband, for Lorenzo can live out his life as Edmund did, and perhaps find love, too. For even to do away with all our suffering I would not relinquish one moment in your arms."

"Love is the most beautiful thing in life and after it," he murmured. "Even the Manci admitted it was eternal. Oh, Sancia, someday we will be together forever in a glory where there is no pain!

"But now kiss me, for I feel my senses failing and I would greet eternity with the touch of your lips on mine."

Sancia leaned over and pressed her mouth to his. For a second he returned her kiss, then she felt his body grow slack, and his head fell back on the pillow.

Guido was dead. Not even Sancia's frantic efforts could revive him. His face was cameolike, thin and translucent.

Sancia had no time for grief. She caught the bell pull that hung beside the great bed and tugged at it frantically.

When her serving woman came she issued quick instructions.

"Bid old Maria bring my son to me, but before he comes into this room, blindfold his eyes."

She got out of bed and put on her robe automatically. Then she lit some candles from the night light and went to a chest in the corner. She opened a drawer and took out the jeweled belt upon which Edmund had hung the bag of skin. Since Guido had had no use for it, it had been put away.

That done, she went back to bed. On Guido's ravaged face was an expression of peace which she had not seen there for a long time. She leaned over and kissed him once again just as old Maria led the blindfolded Lorenzo into the room.

"Is this a game, Mother?" the boy asked.

"Yes, my son." Sancia made her voice calm and motioned silence to Maria, though the latter gesture was not needed, for the old woman understood instinctively. "You must do just as I say, Lorenzo."

"Of course, Mother, but it is odd to be playing games in the middle of the night."

"This is a game your father wants you to play for his sake. Come, my child, let me guide your hand."

She took his small fingers in hers and pulled them over until they touched the bottom of the bag that still hung on Guido's throat.

"Pull gently at what you feel," she told him.

THE boy obeyed. As he did so the bag fell away from Guido's neck like a satiated tick. At the same moment Sancia snatched Lorenzo's fingers back. When they lost contact with the bag the boy screamed in pain, but even that went unheeded by Sancia, for she saw on Guido's throat the marks of a human mouth inside a large red circle that corresponded to the circular opening of the bag which now lay open on the bed.

Sancia forced herself to look. The bag, strangely enough, was empty, but on the bottom she could see the imprint of a pair of lips and a smear of blood—Guido's blood!

The ice within her cracked again—ominously. She must hurry or she could not finish her task.

"Fasten the belt around his waist," she told Maria who, as though she understood the urgency, obeyed quickly. "Now, Lorenzo, pull hard upon these strings. The pain will stop then."

Sancia put the strings of the bag into his two hands. He pulled hard and stopped screaming as the opening closed, shutting away forever those gruesome lips.

"Knot it!" Sancia cried. "Tight!"

The ice would be broken in a few seconds more.

"I have knotted it tight, Mother, and the pain has gone." The boy spoke shakily.

"Then put it on the belt, son, and always wear it, but never open it or the pain will come back."

"Then surely I will never undo those knots," he promised, "for the pain was dreadful."

With Maria's help, Lorenzo slipped the bag strings into place and the bag hung by his side from the belt as he stood there facing Sancia.

The ice had broken now and the force of it was sweeping Sancia away—away to where Guido was. She had just strength enough to motion to Maria to take Lorenzo from the room before she fell lifeless at Guido's side. . . .

Then suddenly I was no longer Sancia. I was Alice Parker, back in my hotel room. It was hot, stiflingly hot, but I was shivering with the cold—that cold I had brought with me out of the past.

Once more I had relived an adventure of the long-gone Ayours, a terrible one. At my side still hung the bag of skin on the jeweled belt, just as I had last seen it on Lorenzo

through Sancia's eyes. I shivered, for I knew now that inside the bag those lips were still there!

I had lived a lifetime in a short while and been through more horror than any human being could stand. I would give up delving into the past. I would sell the bag and belt to Sheila. She wanted it—well, she should have it. I had no sooner made the decision than the indomitable Parker spirit, not to mention curiosity, rose up in me. At the end of the week we were going to Venice—Venice, where the Manci palace still existed. If I wore the bag that had once masked her face, to her former dwelling place—who knew what might happen!

I was shaken and devastated by the experience I had just passed through, but that was all. I, myself, was not harmed. I decided I would wait until I had been to Venice and the Manci Palace before I sold the bag to Sheila.

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FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE BAND OF DEATH

A Novelet of Inhuman Bondage

BY ELI COLTER

PLUS NOVELETS AND STORIES BY EARL PIERCE, JR., AUGUST W. DERLETH, E. HOFFMANN PRICE, SEABURY QUINN AND OTHERS

Johnny Barton, Ball Player, Moves Backward Into the Mists of Antiquity Where Soda Pop Is Nectar

"Lay off that eight-ball stuff," Johnny snapped at the strange assemblage

Adventure in Valhalla

By JOSEPH H. HERNANDEZ

Author of "Gun Creed," "Blaze of Glory," etc.

JOHNNY BARTON swung a sweetly balanced length of ash in his left fist as he watched Joe Dilkert, Arkville fielder, take a second strike. He grinned. He hoped Dilkert would breeze. That would be two gone, and nobody on, and then if the game was to be won, why Johnny Barton would leap into the breach, and win it.

Johnny was good, and he knew it. He was self-satisfyingly fresh—and everybody knew *that*.

Dan McGee, Arkville's harassed manager, grabbed the arm of his greatest asset and greatest headache. Over the dugout thundered the roar from the jammed stands. It wasn't a World Series, but fans were shoe-horned into the bleachers for this last game of the season between the rival cities of Mayberry and Arkville.

"Listen, Johnny," McGee pleaded. "No clowning this time." It was half a warning, half a plea. "This setup needs all we got. Series tied—deciding game—first half of the ninth, an' no score—"

"I ain't been up yet," Johnny chuckled.

"You've been up before. If you pull any screwy plays an' blow this game, the Arkville fans'll kill you when we get back. If they don't, *I* will!"

"G'wan, Mac. You'll pelt me with rose petals. Why, I got that glass-armed jay-hawker sized up perfect. A cinch. Why—"

Dilkert swung wildly. The ball socked into the catcher's mitt and stayed there. Johnny grinned.

"Don't go 'way, Mac. I got a date with four bases. Be right back."

Gloomily, the Arkville manager watched his star player swagger to the plate. Yerkes, the catcher, scowled and growled under his breath. Johnny tugged down his cap after a quick salute to the cheering stands, poised himself, waiting. A smile curved his amiable mouth tauntingly.

THE pitcher's arm revolved. From a broken arc the sphere sped suddenly, cutting the plate corner. The umpire's bawl of "S-s-trike one" was lost under the racketing bedlam pouring down onto the greensward. Over his shoulder Johnny winked toward Dan McGee's murderous-looking face. Yawning, he tapped the rubber. He never moved a muscle as a second strike was called. Abruptly, he motioned to the umpire for a second's delay, and his brown arm described an imaginary parabola that ended in the left-field bleachers.

McGee groaned, swore silently. Cheers and cat-calls came from the steel tiers. But a quiet tensity pervaded the huge stadium as the pitcher wound up.

The ball zipped plateward. Every nerve, every muscle taut, Johnny crouched. At the last fractional instant the ball hooked sharply. But Johnny was there to meet it, the bat lashing savagely.

The impact was terrific. Skyrocketing, the horsehide glinted in hot sunlight, headed over the left-field bleachers.

A hurricane of sound surged from every throat as he jogged lazily, almost contemptuously, around the diamond. Back in the dugout, pausing only for several bows, he snickered at McGee.

"Hiya, pal! Any big league scouts come down yet?"

"Nice work, kid. But was that stage show necessary?"

"Why not? Them buckwheat-eaters might as well see everything. They won't see me in the bushers for long. I'm too good—too fast for this circuit." His thumb jerked expressively as the last Arkville batter grounded out to first. "See, Mac? You got a herd of bums. Except me."

McGee gripped the bench, choking for control, and stared helplessly after the lean, well-muscled figure striding cockily out toward right field.

"My poor gray-haired old mother," he mumbled. "Lucky she's not alive to see her son hanged for murder!"

DEEP in right field, Johnny Barton accepted the plaudits of the crowd with calm indifference. A sense of well-being filled him to bursting, and he visioned great flocks of winged greenbacks soaring his way.

The vicious smash of horsehide on ash startled him out of his roseate

dreams. A Mayberry batter singled through short. Lincoln, the Arkville left fielder, came in fast, scooped up the ball and whipped it to second, checking the runner on first.

Mayberry rooters clamored even after the second batter fiyed out to the third baseman.

A fan in the stands bellowed: "Hey, Barton! Yuh better start packin'. Back to the sticks for you bums!"

Johnny wheeled, grinning derisively at the sea of faces. A resounding roar turned him suddenly back to business. He had a glimpse of a sphere zooming over the first baseman's head. Racing madly forward, too late to make the catch, he took the ball on a short hop, rifling it to third. But the damage was done. Runners on first and third.

A discord of jeering voices pelted Johnny's burning ears.

"I'm fed up on this tin-horn circuit," he muttered.

The Arkville catcher gobbled in a shallow pop foul. Two out. A feeling of relief settled on the lean fielder's mind. The game was in the bag.

Lonegan, Mayberry slugger, strode to the plate, swinging a massive bludgeon. He connected solidly with the first pitch. The ball screamed heavenward. Johnny saw it arcing toward him, and gauged its flight. A couple of seconds and the game would be history—history made by Johnny Barton.

The curving line of flight broke, and the ball flashed down. Sun lanced Johnny's eyes blindingly. An earsplitting cascade of sound engulfed him. Stabbing his gloved-hand high, he felt the spinning horse-hide strike his fingertips, and carom.

The next instant a shower of fire bathed his brain, drenching it in streamers of blazing flame. . . .

SHAKILY, Johnny Barton sat up, conscious of sharp spears of pain in his head. Through a misty blur he regarded the crowd ringing him. He blinked, squeezing his eyelids tightly closed, and then popped them open again. He couldn't believe what he saw. It was impossible, fantastic. And, yet—

He heard himself speak, hollow-voice.

"Gosh-a-'mighty! What's happened? Where—"

Never had he seen such outlandish garb as clothed the men in the ring around him. Some were in white linen robes, with sandals strapped to sturdy legs. Circlets of gold filigree crowned their heads. Others wore soft leather jerkins. Carven gold helmets topped their blond curls. Thick yellow beards swept majestically away from square, rock-hard chins.

"I'm d-dead," Johnny gasped. "Deader'n a canned tuna! I gotta be dead to see what I'm seein'."

A silver-dusted beard approached. Beyond its curling magnificence, a powerfully-thewed man eyed Johnny. Green olive branches wreathed a prominent brow, above piercing blue eyes.

"Stand up, punk!" the bearded one growled.

Johnny gulped, stood up uncertainly. His roving eyes took in the stadium's white grandeur—gleaming Carrara marble with dazzling golden seats, laced intricately with silver—canopies of royal blue silk shading the vast assemblage from the sun's rays. And the Arkville right fielder gloomily realized that every eye was turned his sorry way.

"So you've come at last, eight-ball!" Whiskers snapped bitingly.

Johnny's courage oozed back. After all, he *was* Johnny Barton, star of the Keystone League, and ready for fast company. Nobody talked like that to him. Jamming knotty fists on his hips he snarled sourly:

"Listen, pop! I don't know what your racket is. I don't care. But get this: lay off that eight-ball stuff. I no like."

"Ho! Ho! Ho!"

The silvery leonine head was tremulous with laughter, laughter in which the entire stadium joined. Great waves of hilarity slapped his ears, and Johnny's face burned hotly.

"That goes for all you punks! Anybody wanna make something out of it?"

"Quiet, busher!"

The command cracked out. Johnny Barton felt his ire shrivel like slush under a broiling sun.

"They're all wacky!" he muttered. "Screwballs!"

The bearded leader scrutinized him closely—gray-flannel Arkville uniform, vividly scarlet socks, huge scarlet A.

"Corny dresser, too," he observed. "Always the same. We get the scraps, the eight-balls."

"I'm Barton—Johnny Barton!" came the half-defiant retort. "Lead the Keystone League in batting. Fast on the bases, and—"

"Cow-pasture leagues," Whiskers sighed. "Heigh-ho. The game must continue. We've got to finish before dark. The torch-lights are darn messy." Frowning, he stroked his chin. "And, I'm afraid, Liverlips, you won't be no daisy to either the Greeks or the Swedes."

THROUGH the circle pushed a burly figure in leathern and bronze trappings. Open-mouthed, Johnny stared at this fresh specimen of gargantuan manhood.

"Holy smokes! King Kong!"

"Ay say dis," the newcomer rumbled angrily. "Ve do not vant dis feller. Ve yust don't vant him—not any."

A little bald man with a voluminous toga several sizes too large for him bustled up. His beet-red face glistened with perspiration as he yelped excitedly:

"We ain't takin' him either, Zeus. You ain't dealin' no dog off on us. I may be little, but I ain't no dopey fall guy!"

"Now look here, Apollo," the bearded leader remonstrated. "He barged in. I didn't have no say-so in it. You know the rules and regulations. Once these ball-park tramps come, they stay—and play."

Apollo regarded Johnny balefully. An icy finger trailed along the Arkvillian's spine.

"Forget it, guys," he broke in. "I'll just scram—"

Hilarity greeted his remarks. The hoary-headed leader's shoulders shook convulsively.

"He'll scram," he howled. "Tie that one."

Finally, with little explosions of mirth, he panted:

"Listen, buddy. Nobody leaves this jernt. Nobody!"

A silvery jingle of bracelets echoed as he pointed over lush green fields toward a black, sluggish river.

"Charon's waitin' for a work-out on wise guys like you. Bushers that don't like our league. So button your lip."

"Hey!" Johnny blurted out. "What the hell is this?"

"Cloudbuster's League. The Greek division took the Aegean pennant. Thor's Squareheads here copped off the Valhalla Cup. Today's the final play-off."

Apollo grunted disgustedly. "An' we get handed a red hot like that."

"Dat's yust vat ay say," Thor croaked, tossing unkempt locks. "Ve don't take chances losin' dat pennant."

"Toss, boys," the old man suggested amiably. "Flip a coin. Cry?"

"Heads—"

"Tails—"

A gold piece spun into the sunlight, fell, shone. Apollo, the bald cherub, laughed gleefully. "Tails. He's your meat, Squarehead. Cherish him, palsy."

Wrathfully, Thor's features blackened.

"Yumpin' Yiminy! Ay bane disgusted. Come on, poonk!"

Apollo grinned with delight. "The

first break I had since I lost my hair an' took on weight. Hey, Pinfeathers. Take care of this lug!"

A slim youth with winged sandals appeared lightly beside the flabbergasted Johnny Barton.

"I gotcha, Appy. Let's go, lug!"

WIND whistled past Johnny's ears. In less than a second he was reposing on a pearl-inlaid bench near home plate.

"Look," he said when he could get his breath, "I'm no guinea pig. Just a nice friendly guy. All I want is the lowdown on this racket. Where I come from, I'm a big shot. In one game I stole six bases—"

"Six bases! Whoops!" Pinfeathers poked Johnny playfully. "You finks and doodlers prob'bly call that grand larceny! Listen, Muttonhead. In a kid league, I stole fifty-three bases in one game."

"Got any more of them marijuana cigarettes?" Johnny scoffed. "You sure pile it on. Why, you could outstep Mercury—"

"Out-step? Look, mister. I *am* Mercury! The other's just a nickname. I'm official batboy. Say, they're gettin' ready again."

Toga-clad players swarmed onto the greensward.

"Muscles—Hercules, out there—he knocked four hundred an' ten homers this season," Pinfeathers pointed out. "He's slippin', though. Herk covers first. Agammemnon's on the keystone sack, an' Big Boy Atlas takes care of short. Paris fields third."

The Greek pitcher, without any visible effort, smoked a ball across the plate.

"Old Achilles is buzzin' 'em in," Pinfeathers chortled. "Odysseus can hardly hang onto 'em."

Johnny's eyes sought his own right field position. "Who's that—the mug with the jug?"

"Rumpot," Pinfeathers grinned slyly. "Least, we call him that. Real name's Bacchus. But he loves his corn. Ain't seen him minus the jug all season."

The snowy-haired Zeus danced agilely in center field.

"C'mon, you guys. Little lively. Woik hard, everybody."

"Mean to say the old guy plays, too?"

"Zeus? Maybe he's old, but he's got young ideas."

A chariot drawn by four coal-black stallions flashed from an enclosure back of home plate, thundering past the stands. Through a golden megaphone the driver roared in stentorian tones:

"Loki at bat for the Swedes!"

Achilles wound up, pitched. A sizzling cloud of smoke snaked from his hand into Odysseus' mitt, caught Loki napping. The fans roared.

But Loki smashed the next pitch deep into right field. It mounted higher and higher, finally vanishing. Eagerly all eyes scanned the blue vault and a sharp gasp broke as the spinning pellet dropped into sight.

Bacchus regretfully set down his jug, ambled with bovine grace across the turf. Into his out-stretched glove the ball thunked.

"Rumpot— Rumpot— *Y-a-a-ay!*" cheered the stands.

Tossing back the ball, Bacchus rejoined his jug and curled on the velvety grass sleepily.

"Why, he didn't half try!" gasped Johnny.

"Grandstander!" Pinfeathers said. "Playin' up to the crowd. Swelled head, that's all."

"Oh-h!" gulped Johnny. He seemed to dwindle in stature magically. The words sounded strangely familiar.

OUT of the stands rolled the chariot again, with a mad wailing of trumpets and flutes weaving about the announcer's voice. Pinfeathers chuckled, tapping his toe rhythmically.

"Swing it, gate," he hummed. "Ol' Hector an' his Hep-cats are in the groove."

Utterly bewildered, Johnny Barton rubbed his eyes and ears, and essayed to evolve some semblance of sense and reasoning out of the entire insane mix-up. The chariot rumbled past noisily.

"Thor at bat for the Swedes!"

Frantically, Pinfeathers applauded, swelling the ovation that greeted the burly batsman.

"Now, there's a guy what can slug. He don't need no bat. That hammer's good enough."

Pop-eyed, Johnny half rose. Thor, standing spraddled-legged, gripped a gigantic hammer in his leather-gauntleted fist. He hit the first ball pitched, shattering it into a cloud of flying threads and ribbons. The stands rocked with applause as he jogged around the bases, waving the lethal hammer. Achilles consoled himself with an ostentatious massaging of his left heel.

Mercury chuckled. "That old gag. His sore heel's the alibi for ninety percent of the hits made off him. Everybody's wise now, an' razzes him."

But Johnny Barton was not listening. His dazed eyes were tracing the flight of pure white doves, soaring from silver cages, mounting high over the stadium.

With unerring precision they circled and made the formation:

GREEKS	0
SWEDES	1

Johnny Barton looked like a man who's just had a friendly chat with a corpse or two.

"Now—now I've seen everything," he whispered.

A dark young man bustled past, bearing a tray of frosted chalices.

"Ice-cold nectah!" he bawled. "Getcha ice-cold nectah!"

"Hey!" Pinfeathers called. "Two comin' up."

The stinging sweetness of the icy liquid sent tiny flames of exhilaration coursing through Johnny's body. He licked his lips, sucking in a deep breath, and grinned.

"Drink up. I'll buy another round."

Pinfeathers demurred. "One's enough. A couple o' them distilled lightnings'll leave ya slug-nutty."

JOHNNY'S eyes trailed after the young fellow dispensing refreshments, and widened with interest as he handed up a chalice to an attractive woman in a silken-hung box.

"Who's the babe?" he asked eagerly. "Say! This jernt ain't maybe so bad, after all."

"Hey, lay off!" Pinfeathers warned him. "She's private stock. That bim's Helen of Troy. One wrong dame. Paris is still totin' the torch for her, but she's fadin' like a Class D picture. She's been ganderin' the bottom of too many empty goblets. The lads call her Nectar Nell."

"Interduce me, chum."

Mercury scowled, shrugged defeatedly.

"You're the sucker. C'mon."

Johnny realized that his companion's words had been pure understatement. Helen's eyes were droopy, delicately bagged, and there were heliotrope veins in her nose.

"Is this the bum from down under?" she said scathingly.

Mercury snickered. "He means well, sis."

Johnny felt warm around the neckband. He was glad when the crack of a bat drew attention from himself. Tyr, a strapping big fellow with corn-yellow hair, had slammed the ball into deep center and was trying to stretch it into a triple. The fans leaped to their feet as Zeus retrieved the sphere and pegged it in bullet-fast. Tyr was faster, however, and dived, sliding under the baseman's whipping glove. He was safe.

The next towhead up lined a sizzling grounder through the pitcher's box. The ball smoked out to Zeus again, but the runner was safe and another run crossed the plate.

Overhead, the doves fluttered, military-smart, crediting the Swedes with two runs.

The next man grounded out, and Helen beckoned to Thor.

"Why don'tcha put this lug in, Thorry?" she purred around the set of phony porcelains. "You got a two-run lead. He couldn't do much harm."

Thor's bass chuckle rumbled like wind through snow-swept fjords.

"Dat's good idea. Ay tank ve vin game anyhow, so vy not get laugh."

"Batter up!" the umpire yelled impatiently.

"Git out der," Thor growled. "Yust sving, an' ve git on vit game."

Johnny's face flamed. Raising his chalice, he faced Helen.

"Here's to your limpid blue nose," he said.

"Blue eyes," she simpered.

Johnny slugged down the rest of the iced lava.

"You heard me," he said over his shoulder.

A WAVE of jeering laughter met him as he trudged to the plate, trailing a massive bat. Determinedly, eyes slitted, he took his stance. Through the silver-mesh mask, Odysseus grunted.

"Don't crowd the plate, stooge. His fast one's got murder on it."

Johnny ignored the remark. The next instant acrid fumes burned beneath his nostrils. Odysseus plucked the singed sphere from the scorched leather mitt.

"That's showin' sense. Just stand clear."

"Take the busher out!" shrieked the stands. "Feed him to the lions!"

Johnny swallowed hard. Achilles wound up fast. The ball cannoned in. Futilely, Johnny swung, and sprawled in the dust. The crowd jeered, howling with mirth. Through it, he could hear Helen's cackling laughter, and he scrambled grimly to his spikes. He was still Johnny Barton, ace slugger of the Arkvilles—

The ball arrowed in, hooking sharply. Mustering every ounce of strength in his lean hard body, Johnny swung. The crack of bat against ball was sweet music in his ears. Into the blinding sunlight he peered, shading his eyes, seeking the rocketing sphere.

He was about to run when Odysseus brushed past him wearily, picked up the ball from the dirt before the rubber and tagged him out.

"It ain't et'ical to bunt on the last strike, buddy," he said. "An' say: I been all over, seen everyt'ing. But you *are* lousy. Why don'tcha take up ring-toss?"

A h a r d, h o r n y hand clapped Johnny's neck before he could retort hotly.

"Git out in de field," Thor ordered sourly. "You are yust a yoke. If any flies come your vay, let Tyr or Baldur take 'em. Go ahead—before I vork over you vit dis hammer."

Johnny sulked out to right field, aware of laughter rippling from the boxes as he passed. Turning his back on the ridicule, he saw that Agammemnon was striding to the plate.

Thor started to throw pitches that proved on closer inspection to be lightning bolts, and retired Agammemnon on three pitches.

Odysseus traded three lusty swishes for a hollow goose-egg, and flung the bat over the stadium wall with an angry bellow. Elatedly, the Swedes hopped around the diamond, talking it up lustily.

Too quickly, though. For the next batter, Achilles, singled sharply. Old Zeus, the speedboy, streaked down to first to run for the limping pitcher.

Thor kicked his pitching rubber furiously, and gave Atlas a free pass, advancing Zeus to second.

"Ya-a-ay!" shrieked the stands. "He's blowin' up!"

Tension, electric and raw, gripped the assemblage. Silence blanketed the steel tiers, silence that shattered as Apollo beat out an infield hit and loaded the bases!

With the Greek rooters blowing their tops, Hercules swaggered to the plate, waving an uprooted oak tree for a bat.

Thor settled down to fierce pitching. Thunderbolts flashed about his head. A pall of smoke followed each rocketing heave.

Two strikes, three balls!

THE umpire tossed in a fresh ball. There was a breathless pause as Thor dirtied it up.

During the pause Johnny heard a sob behind him. He turned and gaped at an attractive woman slowly pacing across the turf.

"Ain't I met you before?" he asked. "Or, that is, ain't I heard about you? You're Niobe."

Her pale face lighted, and suddenly she burst into strident laughter.

"So you've heard of me—weeping for centuries? Well, listen, sonny. You handed me the first real belly laugh I've ever ripped off." Her crowing mirth mounted. "See you off on the Styx boat tonight, and—"

Johnny heard the blasting crack, figured it as a peal of thunder. But when Niobe gasped and cried, "There goes the ball game," he whirled.

Hercules had connected with the ball. Already it was disappearing into fleecy clouds over right field—right over Johnny Barton's rigid figure!

He exploded into action, turning, racing back. He could dimly make out the ball curving down, plummeting through the lacy mist. It was still far ahead of him, seemed to be heading for the black river, surging along.

Breath burned through his lips as he panted, stumbling along over the uneven turf. The ball was coming down just short of the river, but far to the right. He slipped to his knees, somehow managed to get into stride again. His eyes were riveted on the speeding sphere.

He veered again to avoid a boatman who was leaning idly against the rail of his rickety craft, smoking placidly. The boatman cocked a quizzical eyebrow, pointed with the stubby pipestem.

"Gotta step on it, bub," he advised solemnly. "Your fare's already paid across, if you flop on it. I'm Charon, an' ol' man river Styx is jest waitin' for sloppy bushers."

Smoking, sputtering, giving off little blue-yellow explosions, the ball cometed down.

"Faster, heel. Get the lead out," Charon mocked. "You stepped outa your class. This is big-time."

Johnny reeled ahead. "I'll—catch it—if it's the last thing I do," he panted. "Maybe—it—will be—the last thing—I do—"

Blinded by the sun, he stabbed out with gloved paw. He just *had* to make this final out. There was no telling what these wacks would do if he flopped on the play.

With projectile force the ball smote him. He stumbled back, heard Charon's crazy giggling cackle as he sprawled with his head half in the waters of the Styx. Struggling, he fought his way up.

Idiotically, Charon laughed. "Don't fight . . . don't fight, son. . . ."

JOHNNY BARTON felt the water dripping in warm rivulets from his cheeks. A voice was saying, gently:

"Don't fight, son. You're okay, Johnny."

Sunshine made Johnny blink as he weakly sat up.

"I got it!" he yelled exultantly, clutching the hard horsehide in his knotted fist. "Them Greeks didn't win. An' Nectar Nell won't have any last laugh on me—"

"Snap out of it, Johnny," McGee said, insistently. "Head still dizzy?"

The manager's rugged and ugly little countenance merged into Johnny Barton's line of vision.

"You ran smack into the wall after catching Lonegan's fly ball. Knocked you silly."

"Um-m-m," Johnny muttered. "Silly, hey? You don't know the half of it." Sheepishly, he smiled. "About—what I said before. My bein' too good for the team. That's out. An'— Aw, take a sock at me, Mac, will ya? Pin my ears back—"

"Forget it. Hustle and get dressed. We can't be late for the banquet. Some big-shot Svensky friends of the bosses up in the front office are tossin' us a victory feed at that big Greek restaurant downtown."

Johnny blinked, and a swirling vision eddied before him—of huge figures in bronze and gold and leathern trappings, and miles of greensward unrolling before a glistening white marble stadium.

"The Greeks an' the Swedes," he groaned. Quietly, he folded over like a deftly turned pancake.

McGee took one look, and screeched maniacally:

"Water! Get some water, quick! He's fainted again!"

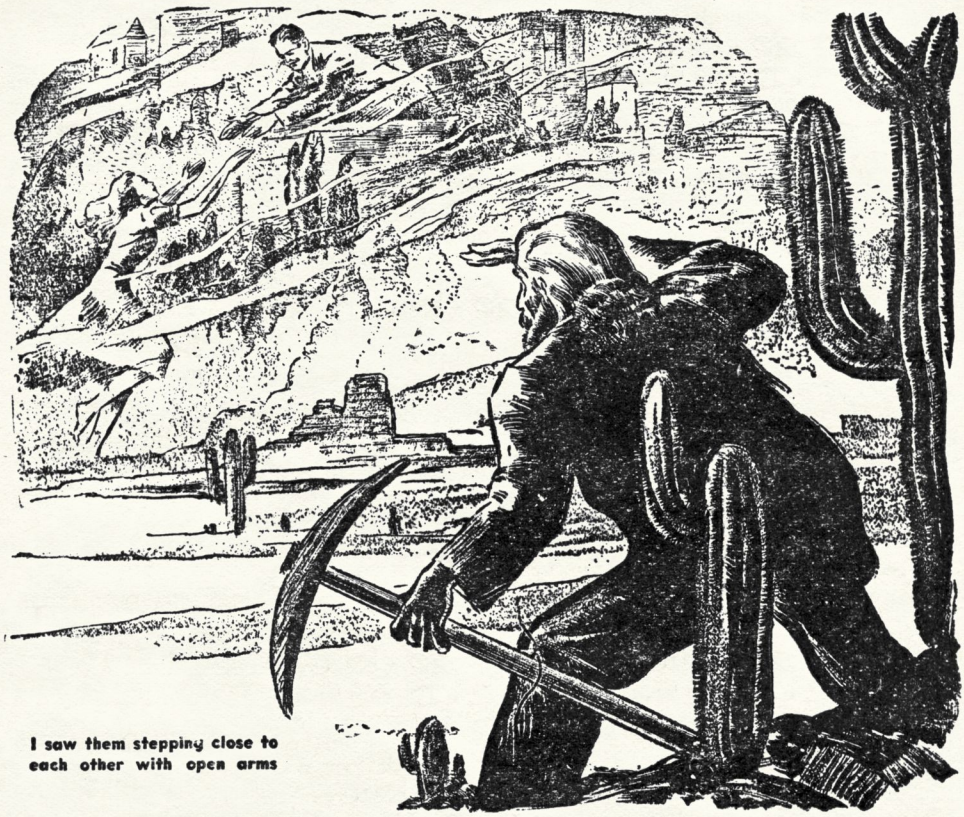
COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE SHADOW OF NIRVANA

A Complete Novelet of a Mystic Spell That Could Only Be Broken by Death

By EARL PIERCE, JR.

Behind the Desert Haze Over the Frying Pan, the Crumbled Ruins of 'Dobe Castle Were Restored Into the House That Jack Had Built!



I saw them stepping close to each other with open arms

THE MISSING MIRAGE

By DON ALVISO

Author of "The Hunchback of Hanover," "Death Is Forbidden," etc.

YES, I closed up my place out on the desert highway two months ago. Time was when I made a good living off that gas station and lunch counter out there on the edge of the Frying Pan desert. I owned the land where the buildings stood, too, but I just gave it all back to the Indians and moved away.

Some folks over there along the muddy Colorado River might tell you that old Joe Budd got scared out, but it isn't so. I prospected for better than twenty years all through the Shadow Mountains and that hell's kitchen of a desert they call the Fry-

ing Pan. I've busted bottles off the back-bars in the best saloons in towns that never even left a ghost to be remembered by. I made three rich strikes—and lost them. I had fun making them, and more fun losing them, but I know when I'm licked.

So, if anyone tells you that old Gold Rush Joe got scared off the desert, you can stop buying 'em drinks. And put 'em down as guys who don't know the difference between being scared, and having a wholesome respect for things too queer for a plain man to savvy.

When my Nancy burro died of old age seven years ago, I just lost heart for prospecting and started that little gas station and lunch counter out on the desert highway. Sold pink gasoline and ice-cold bellywash of the same color, and even tourists from the east said I put out the best hamburger sandwiches between Tucumcari and Culver City.

Maybe you remember the place, right where the road winds up to the top of the mesa and then swings southwest along the rim? You might even have stopped there at some time or other, and if it happened to be along in the middle afternoon, then I know you saw the 'Dobe Castle.

Folks used to call it a mirage and it was listed like that on the road maps. I even used to tell the customers it was a mirage myself, and maybe it was, but—well, I don't know. Up to the time of the 'Dobe Castle, all the mirages I ever saw on the Frying Pan was water. Lakes and ponds and long flat rivers that wasn't there. But the 'Dobe Castle was different, and in a way I just can't put a handle to. I'll tell you all I know, and you can write your own ticket from there on.

ONE comfortable warm July afternoon a big black sedan rolls up and takes on twenty gallons of ethyl. These new cars look so much alike I long ago quit trying to tell one make from the other. But this one carried a foreign brand on her plates, and that made me wonder what outfit she was from. There wasn't no earmark on her radiator or the hub caps, but the driver tells me to lift up the "bonnet" and check the oil. I translated "bonnet" into hood, and when I gets a squint at the engine I see a chromium plate that says Rolls-Royce.

A stuffed-looking gent in tweeds got out of the back seat and walked over to the railing at the cliff edge. I saw then that he and the driver were the only ones riding this Pullman-sized crate that could have hauled a round-up crew.

This fella reminds me of one of them English dukes, and I could see that he wasn't standing the heat good. He swabs his moist bald head with his monogrammed handkerchief for a while and looks out over the Frying Pan, and then he come over and began laying in bottles of cold strawberry soda. After he got cooled off some, he began asking questions, and since a man gets kind of lonely out here when trade is slow, I didn't mind gassing with him for a while.

He shifts his sixth bottle of pink bellywash over to his left hand, and with his right hand he points out over the desert to the 'Dobe Castle. It was showing up real clear that afternoon —the big saguaro cactus standing straight, like Navajo sentinels all around, and the desert creepers making the dry sand like green in spots. You could even see the joshua wood-railing along the upper balcony, and I stood aside looking at the 'Dobe Castle, too, and remembering the fella that built it.

"An unusual place," this stranger says with a kind of Oxford accent. "But, my word, what could a man be thinking of to build a house like that out in this God-forsaken country? Who would spend good money building a home so far from civilization?"

I'd shown the 'Dobe Castle to so

many people that I took a kind of real pride in it, and so I was a little hurt at the way he talked. But I tells myself that here was a gent who was trusting enough to believe his own eyes, and I didn't see no sense in disillusioning him.

"A trail rider by the name of Jack Barr built it," I says. "And what it cost him wasn't money, but six months of back-breaking labor, and maybe other personal things that I wouldn't know about."

At the mention of the name of Jack Barr, a kind of light comes into the stranger's eyes, and a sort of shadow passes over his face.

"Jack Barr—" he says thoughtfully, and begins rubbing his florid chin.

"That's the name," I affirms. "I understand he was an Englishman, and that he got shipped out for making eyes at the wrong girl or something like that. However, I never held neither his forebears nor his choice of women against him. Barr would have been one swell hombre, regardless.

"Would have been?" this stranger sort of gasps. "You mean he's—he's dead?"

"I reckon he is. Said he had to get a lot of money quick, so he took to prospecting. His burro came in one night about two years ago dragging an empty canteen. Out here on the Frying Pan that's about as sure a sign as if you'd see the undertaker drive up to a house in the city."

"Then—I'm too late," the Duke says shaking his head and looking kind of sad. "But since you knew this—this Jack Barr, perhaps you could tell me more about him."

I SMELLS a whole pack of rats in the way this stranger acts, but on the chance he might guzzle another half dozen bottles of soda if he hung around a while longer, I figured there was no harm in telling him what I knew.

"Not much to tell," I started out. "Barr was awful green when he first come to the range country 'bout eighty mile to the south. He'd never seen a cow before, but he knew horses and he could ride. Rode for the Half-Moon for a spell and the foreman down there said Barr rode like a polo player. Well, he picked up cattle savvy right away, and he got along fine. He was awful quiet, they say, but that's not a fault in this man's country, and everybody liked him.

"Looked like he was going to ride the Half-Moon range the rest of his life, when one day the boss gets a letter from a friend of his in Boston. The letter asks if the Half-Moon can take in a guest for six months or so. It seems that this guest is a young Englishwoman, the wife of a count or duke or something. She's a lunger; pretty bad off, and they're bringing her out to the western desert as sort of a last hope.

"Well, the night before the girl was due, Jack Barr saddles up and just fades away into the moonlight. They tell me he left a sealed letter for this sick girl, and that when she read it next day her eyes got bright and she smiled for the first time in months. The Half-Moon boss asks her if Barr said anything in the letter about coming back to the ranch, and she says:

"'Yes. He's coming back—after me. Oh, God! May he be in time'!

"That was the first I ever see of Jack Barr, when he leaves the Half-Moon and comes up here to the Frying Pan. He picks out a spot over there on the flat of the desert, digs a well, and a 'dobe pit, and starts building that house. Guess he patterned it after some place where he'd lived in the old country, cause folks don't build houses like that around here. It's sort of like a castle, as you can see. I felt for him, working there like mad in the heat, and so I takes him over a cold drink and some sandwiches now and then. Once I asks him if he figures on living there, and he says: 'Maybe'. And I says if he

don't live there, who will, and the way he answers makes me feel kind of foolish for asking.

"'Perhaps Diane will live here', he says, sort of dreamy like. 'Of course you wouldn't know Diane, but she's terribly sick and she needs to live where it's high and dry. They say it's her lungs that are killing her, but her heart is broken, too. Perhaps both will mend, if she can come here—with me—and be happy'."

I see that my customer isn't mopping his bald spot any more, but has shifted his handkerchief to his left eye. He takes a pair of spy glasses out of what looked like a lunch box slung from a strap over his shoulder, and begins squinting through them at the 'Dobe Castle which still shows clear in the desert sunset. I'll admit that fact alarmed me a little, because usually before this time the evening haze comes up and wipes out what folks think they see out there.

Finally the Duke says: "I can see a man standing on the balcony. A tall slim man with dark curly hair. He looks like—like Jack Barr!"

"Lots of folks have imagined they see somebody standing on that balcony," I tell him. "Sometimes when I look too long, I even get crossed up myself. But, say, mister, how come you say this fella you see looks like Jack Barr. You ever see—"

"No." He lets the glasses drop and turns toward me. "No. I have never seen him. I suppose I only imagined that he looked somewhat as Barr would look, set in this western atmosphere."

That didn't make sense, but I let it pass. He walked back to his overstuffed gas buggy and the driver got out to hold open the door. Before the Duke climbed in, he paused a moment to ask:

"And this Diane, that your friend Jack Barr built the 'Dobe Castle for—did she ever come to live there?"

"That I can't rightly say," I answered, "About the time Barr finished his job, a couple of hold-uppers stopped here one night and when I wouldn't tell them where I'd hid the money bag, they left me with a slug in the liver. Darn near finished me. I was in the hospital down to Yuma for almost a year, and when I got back the boys told me that Barr was off there in the Shadow Mountains prospecting. I've never seen him since."

The Duke climbed into his car, and through the open window he said:

"I'd like to stay on in this country for a few days. Is there a ranch, or any place near, where I might be able to find accommodations?"

"The Half-Moon is about eighty mile due south," I told him. "The road ain't paved, but it's fair to middlin'. They take in guests sometimes, at the Half-Moon."

HE THANKED me and the big black sedan rolled around the curve of the mesa rim and out of sight. Just a slim red sliver of the sun still showed over the ridge to the west, and out of habit I drifted back over to the railing and looked out over the Frying Pan. While my eyes traced out the lines of the 'Dobe Castle in the dusk, I wondered if I'd done right in not telling the stranger everything.

I'd told him that when I got back from the hospital at Yuma, Jack Barr had gone out into the Shadow Mountains prospecting. That was true as far as it went. But maybe I should have told him too, that in the meantime a cloud burst had dumped about ten million gallons of water on Barr's 'dobe house, and that for the last five years now all there'd been left of the 'Dobe Castle was an indistinct pattern of the crumbling foundations.

Standing there thinking of that, I suddenly caught myself and realized that something was wrong. I was seeing Barr's 'Dobe Castle when it oughtn't to be in sight at all. This stranger's questions had got me so

stirred up I hadn't thought of it before, but now I recalled that a peculiar combination of circumstances had helped to build up the legend of this strange mirage out on the Frying Pan. The ordinary mirage is visible only during certain hours of the day. This might have been true of the 'Dobe Castle; I wouldn't know.

But from sunup till near noon a desert haze obscured the Frying Pan from the rim of the mesa, and before nightfall the haze crept back again over the desert, so that any time you could see the Frying Pan from the mesa at all, you could also see the 'Dobe Castle.

But now, as I stood there at the railing in the fast-lowering desert darkness, the 'Dobe Castle seemed to loom up out of the dusk with a kind of a glow. I guess I shivered a little, remembering Jack Barr the last time I'd seen him: a tall, lean-flanked young fella with curly black hair and sharp black eyes looking out from a frank friendly face.

Another customer drove up to the gas pump, and it wasn't till then that I remembered I hadn't collected for the last four bottles of pop from the stuffed-looking Duke in the Rolls-Royce.

Two more days went by and nothing out of the ordinary happened. The usual summer parade of New Englanders going to California, and westerners heading east, wound along the highway which fringed the mesa. Down on the Frying Pan the 'Dobe Castle was behaving as usual and I began to forget my disturbing talk with the stranger in the Rolls-Royce.

Then, on the evening of the third day the big black sedan rolled up the hill from the direction of the Half-Moon, and as it began to slow down to slide into my parking space by the railing, I reminded myself about collecting from the Duke for those last four bottles of pop.

I was standing by the gas pump and I guess the driver didn't notice me as he pulled to a stop over by the railing. Looking past the big black car, I could see the 'Dobe Castle showing late again, just as it had done three nights before. But I tore my eyes away from that when the door of the sedan opened and a girl stepped out to the gravel. I noticed then, that besides the driver, she was the only one in the car. The stuffed Duke wasn't along. But I forgot all about the Duke and the four bottles of pop when I looked at that girl.

SHE wore some kind of flimsy white dress that made her seem unreal, and there was a small bunch of deep red rosebuds pinned to the left breast. She stood there for a moment looking over the railing toward the Castle while the cool desert night breeze played with loose strands of her golden hair.

A man who has spent his life as I've spent mine don't get to be much of a judge of women, but I guessed this girl must be about the grade of Jack Barr's Diane. Just as I was thinking that, she stepped to the break in the railing, a sort of gate which lets out onto a trail leading down onto the desert floor. No one that I knew of had gone down there for years besides myself, but this golden-haired girl in white drifts off down the steep winding trail just like she knew her way.

By now it was just about dark and I knew the moon wouldn't be up for almost an hour. The thought of her picking her way down that steep trail bothered me, and I was about to mention it to the driver of the car, when I glanced again out over the Frying Pan. The 'Dobe Castle loomed up out there plainer than it ever had before, even in broad day, and that decided me. Something was wrong—or right—I didn't know which, but I did know that no cockney taxi-driver would be of any help in case that girl got into trouble.

This driver was just sitting there in the car, waiting for her to do what

she'd come to do, I suppose. He wouldn't want anything of me, so I circled behind the big black sedan and started down the trail. I'm not as young as I was when Bryan ran for president the third time, but I can still push a lot of dirt behind me. I walked fast for twenty minutes or more before catching sight of the white-clad figure ahead. She didn't seem to be especially hurrying, yet I hadn't gained on her much when I realized that the high walls of the 'Dobe Castle loomed just ahead.

By now the moon was up, and maybe right then at the time I was a *little* scared. The 'Dobe Castle was built on kind of an English style, like an old country home with a high tower at one end and a balcony running across the front. I saw it then just as it was when Barr finished it, and standing there at the balcony rail was Jack Barr. He wore clean Levis stuffed into half-boots, and a clean black shirt topped by a fancy jacket, just as he had when he rode the range. His bronzed face was clean shaven and his dark curly hair clung close to his scalp over his high forehead.

As the girl came close to the balcony, I heard Barr say:

"Diane! Diane, you've come!"

The girl paused, and looked up at him.

"Yes, John," she said, so low I could scarcely catch the words. "I've come —home."

Barr came down from the balcony then and they stepped close to each other with open arms. Up on the mesa a car horn squawked several short blasts and I guessed some tourist was crying for gas. I stayed there long enough to see the nosegay of crimson rosebuds crushed between the man and girl, and then started back up the trail.

I don't know what made me turn after a bit and look back. I suppose I'll never know. There was no sound, no movement, but something made me turn, and when I swung around, the 'Dobe Castle was gone. Jack Barr and Diane were gone, and there was nothing there but the rain-washed crumbling ruins of the 'dobe house, with the moon shining sort of cold like over it all.

I walked quickly back to where I had seen Barr and the girl standing. I looked down for a moment at the two pairs of footprints in the smooth sand and then stooped to pick up the bunch of crushed red rosebuds.

UP ON the mesa rim the car horn blasted again. I turned and hurried up the trail. When I got up to the station the only car there was the big black Rolls. The driver had gotten out and was pacing up and down the road.

"This country must be inhabited by extraordinarily honest people," he said, "if a man can go away and leave 'is place unlocked at night as you've just done. Where 'ave you been for the last hour?"

"I—I followed the girl," I managed to stammer. "Down the trail—to the 'Dobe Castle."

"The girl?" he said. "I can't imagine—"

"The girl in white," I rambled on. "The one you brought here. She started down the trail onto the desert and I was afraid for her, so I followed."

The driver sidled toward the sedan, throwing me a startled glance.

"Lookee, mister. I drove up 'ere alone, see? My employer, Sir Charles Barrister, who is staying temporarily at the Half-Moon cow ranch, sent me up to pay you for four bottles of soda water for which 'e neglected to reimburse you."

"But the girl," I protested. "She wore a white dress and a bunch of red rosebuds, and had golden hair."

The driver took a cautious step toward me and laid four dimes in my hand. He stepped back quickly and climbed into the sedan. From that safe point he spoke again:

"That would be what the Lady Diane looked like the last time I saw 'er, mister. But it couldn't-a been 'er. She died a short while ago, mister. Mighta got well if Sir Charles had let 'er stay 'ere on the desert. But 'e heard 'is brother John was out 'ere somewhere, see? And Sir Charles is awful jealous. You see, mister, the Lady Diane and John Barrister were a lot in love before the families got their 'eads together and made 'er marry Sir Charles. That's the straight of it, mister."

Then, as if afraid he'd already said too much, the driver stepped on the starter and the big car swung around and headed back toward the Half-Moon ranch. I stood there by the railing, gazing alternately from the bunch of crushed rosebuds in my hand to the crumbling ruins of the 'Dobe Castle outlined in the clear moonlight down on the dismal waste of the Frying Pan.

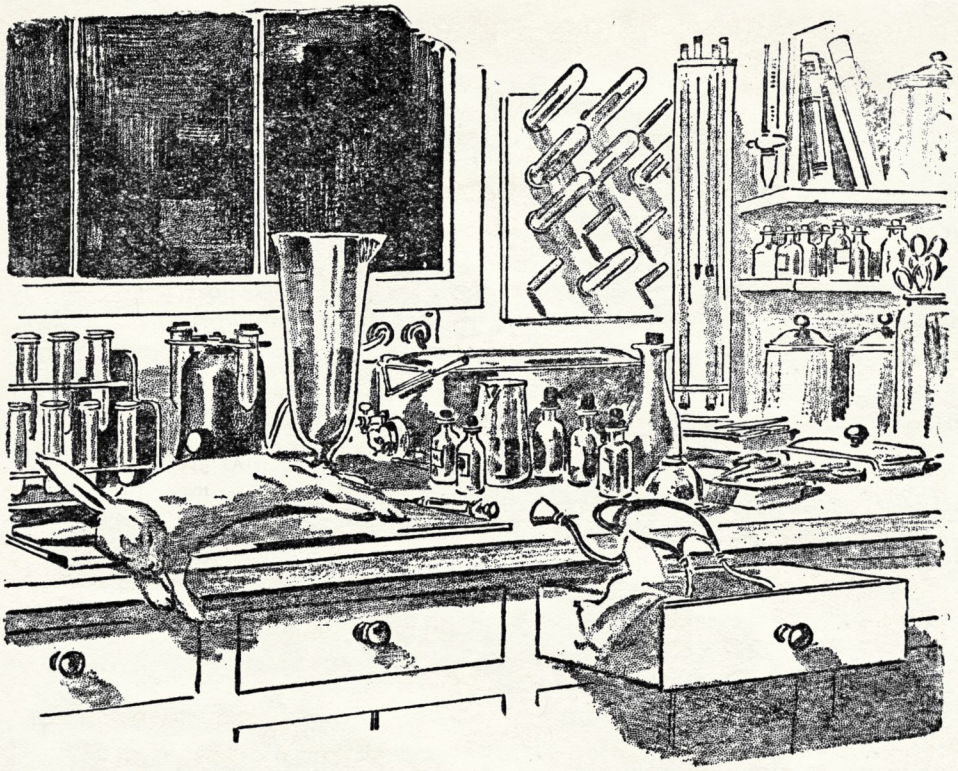
"Jack Barr—John Barrister," I kept muttering over to myself. "So she came back to him—at last."

Well, folks, maybe you can see why I couldn't stand it any longer out there on the mesa rim, looking at those crumbling 'dobe ruins day after day. You're right, the 'Dobe Castle has never been seen again. Sure, the smart guys have got a lot of fancy explanations. Mirages are queer things. They come and they go, and men who spend too many years prospecting alone on the desert wastes get queer ideas in their old age.

Perhaps that's all true, but let me tell you, friends, I've learned one thing for sure in the years I've spent on the desert, and that is that crimson rosebuds don't grow out on the Frying Pan.

Roger Sutton, Scientist, Exults in a Divine Power, But Learns That Death Stands Jealously on Guard When Mortal Man Gambles on Eternal Life!

"Death shall always be at your side, jealous and ready"



The Wine of Hera

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

Author of "The Man Who Was Death," "The Talking Clue," etc.

CHAPTER I

Visitor from the Past

ROGER SUTTON, M. D., saw two things happening at once as he rounded a corner into a quiet street. A sedan was roaring down the middle of the road, and a stooped, incredibly old man was walking directly into the path of the speeding car. Sutton dropped his professional bag and lunged across the street, shouting stridently. But the old man seemed unaware of either Sutton's shouts or the onrushing car.

Sutton dived directly in the path of the machine and seized the pedestrian by the arm. But he was a split second too late. The radiator of the car dusted Sutton's coat and smashed into the old man, throwing him thirty feet away. The driver, white-faced and frantic, stepped on the gas pedal even harder. Sutton cursed him bitterly as he ran back to get his bag. Then he rushed over to the old man.

He raised the victim's head and frowned. The face was thin, pasty and almost dead looking even though this man was not dead yet. Sutton

A NOVELET OF THE LIFE-GIVER

felt of the skinny wrist, found the pulse thready and growing weaker. He opened his kit, extracted a hypodermic needle and rapidly filled it. He looked around for someone to help, but the street was deserted.

Sutton ripped open the man's shirt and gaped at the amazingly thin body that was revealed. He plunged the hypo home, rammed the plunger down, then waited. There was nothing else he could do. This man's spine was broken and he undoubtedly had a bad fracture of the skull. Even the powerful stimulant which Sutton had administered would hardly bring him back to consciousness.

But it did. To Sutton's amazement the man opened his eyes. He didn't groan. He just sighed and smiled wanly.

"I must know the truth," he said in a hoarse whisper. "You will tell me?"

Sutton nodded. The man was entitled to know that his allotted time had dwindled to mere minutes.

"Nothing I nor anyone else can do," he said soothingly. "Where can I get in touch with your people?"

THE old man's deep-set eyes were unblinking and he appeared to be studying Sutton intently.

"You are a doctor. You are also an honest and good man. I am old—much older than you think. I was born three hundred and seventy years ago."

Sutton nodded. "Of course. Now tell me who you are. Hurry!"

The old man smiled. "You do not believe me. No one ever has, but I speak the truth. I know the secret of eternal life. Except for accidents like this one, I could live forever. No—do not think I'm rambling. That is the truth. I swear it. Centuries ago my people befriended a goddess of mythology. Hera—goddess of life. I see you smile. Heed me, Doctor. I am no charlatan nor liar. Hera gave to my people the wine of life. With it none of us need ever die except through accidents, and even the dead may be brought back with it.

"I'm the last of my line. I had decided that with my death the secret would disappear, but you have been kind to me. In return I shall give you—a supreme power. Handle it wisely and well. I—feel weaker. I must speak quickly. Go to the old house at the corner of Queen and Latham Streets. The key is in my pocket. In a cupboard secreted in the upper bedroom closet you will find a jug. You won't mistake it. There are a few drops left. Hera's heritage I leave to you. I ask only that you — protect it — use it — wisely. . . ."

The old man shuddered once and went limp in Sutton's arms. He gently lowered the body to the sidewalk, arose and passed a hand across his damp forehead. Somehow, he had to believe that incredible tale. It was almost as though something had entered his own soul with the death of that old man—something that impelled him to believe.

A radio car rolled to a stop. Sutton identified himself, explained the circumstances of the accident and was allowed to depart. He thought that he was heading toward his office and laboratory when he started, but mysteriously he found himself, without quite realizing how he got there, gazing thoughtfully at a run-down old house. His fingers closed around the key in his pocket. Finally he reasoned that unless he obeyed his instinct to investigate the old man's statements, he would never rest. Better disprove everything, then forget.

He let himself in and shivered as the dampness and mustiness of the old house closed around him. He looked for an electric light switch, then discovered that light was furnished by old-fashioned gas lamps. He lit several and hurried upstairs to the room the old man had indicated. The closet was there and also the tiny cupboard.

Sutton tried to open it, but the door was locked. The only thing he could do was smash it open. He walked out of the closet to look for some instrument with which to attack the panels. Something seemed to move past him, fanning him with

a slight breeze, and at the same moment the room seemed filled with some inscrutable and haunting fragrance.

Sutton turned back to stare into the closet. His eyes grew wide, his breath came in spasmodic jerks as he saw that closed and locked cupboard door slowly swing open as though manipulated by some invisible hand.

WITHIN the cupboard he saw a faint glow, like a tiny halo, around a small odd-shaped jug on which were painted age old symbols. He touched the jug and the halo vanished. Something gurgled within the jug. He removed a stopper made of the same material as the jug. Instantly the fragrance that had filled the room became almost overpowering.

He staggered back into the room and sat down heavily. All this must be part of some fantastic dream! Such things could not be.

But the jug in his hands was no dream. Neither were those symbols painted on it. He replaced the stopper quickly, stowed the jug into his pocket and hurried out of the house as though it were haunted. . . .

In his laboratory, Roger Sutton's hands were shaking badly as he filled a syringe from the tiny jug. He was used to the overwhelming sweet aroma of the blood-red fluid by now. On the laboratory bench before him lay a rabbit—dead for three hours and with rigor mortis already setting in. Sutton had electrocuted the animal twenty minutes after he reached his quarters.

He picked up the syringe, trying to scoff at the whole affair. An old man, delirious and dying, had first said he was three hundred and seventy years old. Then he had presented Sutton with a heritage of eternal life and the power to raise the dead. It was all nonsense and Sutton felt a fool for even experimenting with the stuff.

But he inserted the needle, forced a few drops of the fluid into a vein and waited. Two minutes crawled by and the rabbit still lay stiff and dead. Then, as Sutton felt an urge to hurl the mysterious jug against the wall, he gasped. The rabbit was moving.

He put a stethoscope against the animal's body and listened. The heartbeat was strong and regular. The rabbit, most certainly killed by a huge jolt of electricity and allowed to become cold, was again warm and vibrant with life.

Sutton watched the animal get up without help. He proffered food and the rabbit nibbled it eagerly. Sutton's whole body was saturated with sweat, but a cold, unaccountable fear was gnawing at his soul. He had no right to possess this substance which violated the sanctity of death. No mortal had such a right.

But the rabbit! Who could doubt what the eyes saw? This wine did bring the dead back to life. The old man had been right.

In a half frenzy of panicky fear Sutton seized a beaker and poured the contents of the jug into it. There was less than two centimeters of the blood-red fluid left. Enough for a few injections, but Sutton wanted gallons of it.

Sudden realization of the good he might do struck him with a terrible force. There was one thing to do—analyze the stuff. Here, in the privacy of this lab, where no one would know what his experiments signified.

There was enough of it to do this. He hastily arranged apparatus, lined up a row of reagent bottles and set a test tube rack before him.

It was almost dawn when he finally gave up. The fluid was not simple of analysis. It contained many of the components of human blood, with a trace of a violent restorative drug. But when he tried to compound these essential ingredients, he failed somehow. Another dead rabbit lying before him was proof of that. There was one ingredient which no mortal could ever discover. The Wine of Hera was never to be created by man.

He sighed heavily. Failure was a harsh experience for Roger Sutton. His dogged determination usually

carried him through, but this time he dealt with something supernatural—not meant to be revealed to man.

He started up suddenly. A cool, smooth hand was resting on his wrist. He tensed, but the pressure on his wrist increased and a voice that seemed to sing like a million lutes came to his ears. He stood firm, despite his inclination to run.

"Roger Sutton, there is no need to feel fear. I am Hera, goddess of Life and of Healing. The old man gave my secret to you. With his death it should also have died, for that was a promise I gave myself. Now I have changed my mind. Your foolish attempts to analyze the elixir were bound to fail—but I shall help you. There is no drug upon this earth to lend the power to your concoction. The missing element is in my own keeping, but it is even now instilled into the elixir.

"Because you are, as the old man saw, kind and worthy, I grant you the power over that ingredient. In your hands lies Life, but remember this—Death shall always be at your side, jealous and ready to take you at the first opportunity. Bring your rabbit back to prove to yourself that I have been here. Whatever you do after that, is upon your own conscience."

The laboratory was suddenly very quiet. Roger Sutton pressed a hand to his forehead. Of course this was only a dream. He even laughed sarcastically as he injected the dead rabbit with a few drops of the fluid he had prepared himself.

His laugh became a mingled gasp of amazement and a shout of triumph. The rabbit was alive! But was that proof enough that he possessed the secret of eternal life—as the old man had said? There were ways to find out and he must search for his proof without delay.

As he hastily gathered all his notes and wrote a master formula he cast off the importance of that moment when he dreamed that Hera, goddess of Life, had visited him. Whatever else this drug was, it was all a cold, scientific fact in his mind. The old man had somehow stumbled onto this remarkable elixir and kept his secret for years. Now it belonged to Sutton and through him alone it would reach the world.

CHAPTER II

Modern Lazarus

IT WAS early the next evening when Sutton swung out of his front door, drew up his coat collar and faced the cold blasts of late autumn. This was more or less automatic, for he felt none of the cold. His heart was filled with the elation of knowing that he had accomplished what no other scientist had even dared dream of attempting.

Sutton finally paused before the entrance to a friend's business establishment and entered. As he passed the purple Neon sign that read "Howard Cavender — Mortician," his lips parted in a thin smile. Cavender would not care for this secret. Sutton's amazing drug would ruin an undertaker's business.

Cavender did not look like a mortician. He was chunky, smiling and cheerful as he greeted Sutton.

"Just happened to be passing by and thought I'd drop in for a chat," Sutton said. "You're not busy?"

"Not much to do," Cavender admitted. "There's a cadaver on my embalming table. Haven't had time to work on it yet. Some poor chap who jumped in the river. They hauled him out and worked on him for three hours, but he died of the shock. Want to see him?"

Sutton nodded, hiding his elation. Here was the perfect specimen for his final test. A man who had died of shock—which was the same as saying his heart had stopped beating from over-exertion.

Sutton was well aware that his drug would never bring back to life anyone who had died from a shattering accident. It could not repair a mangled body. But when death came because of the failure of the heart—

that lay within the healing scope of this drug.

Cavender led the way into his embalming rooms. A man of about fifty lay on the slab. He had been taken from the water quickly, so his body was not swollen. He seemed to be fast asleep—except that it was the horrible stillness of death sleep.

Cavender drew on rubber gloves.

"Listen!" Sutton bent his head in the direction of the outer office. "Wasn't that your phone?"

Cavender shrugged and drew off the gloves. "I suppose so, although I didn't hear it. Every time I get busy, it rings. Be right back."

Sutton drew out the leather case containing the hypodermic. It was half full of the crimson, bloodlike fluid. Quickly he bent over the dead man, inserted the needle into the cold flesh, pushed the plunger into the heart, withdrew the needle and hastily stuffed it into his pocket. When Cavender returned, Sutton was idly turning the pages of a mortician's supply catalogue.

"Nobody on the wire," Cavender said, as he drew on his rubber gloves again and picked up an instrument.

He bent over the corpse. Suddenly he gave a shout of horror and drew back. The dead man's lips had parted slowly. His chest muscles were moving. Sluggishly perhaps, but moving. Leg and arm muscles twitched.

The instrument dropped from Cavender's fingers with a clatter. At the sound, the eyes of the man on the table opened. They looked as if a film had been drawn over them, but this rapidly passed off. He groaned and raised one arm.

WITH an impulsive cry of triumph Sutton whipped out a stethoscope and applied it. With horrified eyes Cavender was backing toward the door. And there was something in those eyes as if a tremendous, soul-shaking knowledge had been born of intuition.

"Doc," he said in a strange voice. "Doc—you did this! You brought that man back to life—somehow! You sent me out of the room while you did it. He was dead—stone dead! He was cold! Now he's alive! You did it, damn you!"

Sutton looked up. "Why damn me? What I've done is a miracle of science. All right—I admit I accomplished this, maybe cheated you out of a little business, but is that all a man's life is worth to you?"

"It—it's unnatural!" Cavender was still trembling. "You're fooling with the Infinite, Doc. You're not God. You—you can't do this. It's against all—all—"

"Rules?" Sutton asked. "Science knows no rules. Get a grip on yourself, Howard. Call a doctor. Say you don't know what happened, but this man seemed to come back to life. If you tried to say anything else you'd probably be headed for a padded cell. Now listen to me. Take care of this man. See that he gets anything he wants, and bring him to my laboratory tomorrow. He won't die again. Don't be afraid of that. Spare no expense to make him comfortable. Howard—don't you see—he's a modern Lazarus!"

"Y-yes. I guess so," Cavender managed. "Wh-what will you use for money? You're not wealthy. I—I haven't enough to finance anything like this."

"Money!" Sutton chuckled softly. "Why, with this knowledge tucked away in my mind I can corner half the money in the world. Not that I want it," he added hastily. "I'm only interested in watching the results of my experiment. Look! He's trying to sit up. Get busy, you fool!"

Sutton edged out of the place while Cavender phoned a hospital and tried to persuade them that he wasn't crazy. Five minutes later an ambulance howled up. From across the street Sutton watched police cars arrive. The expensive limousines of high-priced doctors pulled up. Reporters descended on the scene.

An hour went by. Then the crowd of curious pedestrians were parted by a phalanx of police. They were big, hard-bitten men, but all of them were a little green under the gills.

A man walked out of the door, paused, and looked around. It was the man who had been dead! Pop-

eyed doctors clustered around him. Photographers shot dozens of pictures.

Yet Sutton sensed that there was something wrong with it all. The man who had been raised from the dead should have been happy, smiling, but his face was as impassive a mask as it had been when he lay cold in death.

Sutton turned away, drew up his coat collar, pulled down the brim of his hat. By now every policeman in the city would be looking for him. Cavender would not have been able to keep the secret, would have given him the credit for this astounding piece of work. That meant that Sutton's modest little apartment would be jammed with reporters and scientists, his laboratory beseiged by thousands. But the glory could wait. If it never came to him, he didn't care.

HE CHECKED in at a small hotel, went to bed and enjoyed a dreamless sleep. When he awakened, he sent for the morning papers. They should be black with heavily-inked streamers, for this news was greater than an event since newspapers were first printed.

There was a full column story of the mysterious return to life of a man who was about to be embalmed. The reporter had gone easy on the story, hardly expecting his readers to believe it. The dead man was Arthur Lawson, an architect of some note. The sage words of doctors were quoted, indicating that Lawson had passed into some deep stupor simulating death. And there was no mention of Sutton's name.

He threw the paper into a corner and began pacing the floor. Were they afraid to print the truth? Had the world become so smug that it was afraid to face facts?

He stalked out of the hotel and walked rapidly toward Cavender's establishment. Cavender saw Sutton coming and had the door open. He closed it, turned the lock, and then fell into a chair.

"See what you've done?" he cried. "They think I'm crazy! I told them about you and nobody believed it. In Heaven's name, Doc, what do you intend doing about all this?"

Sutton leaned forward and tapped Cavender's knee.

"I'm going to show them so they will believe. After all, I am benefiting humanity. I can prevent sorrow and tears. I can save a man from going to his grave before his time. Edison, Burbank, the Mayo Brothers—they were all honored and respected for the work they accomplished, but combined, their efforts are as nothing compared to what I have done. Cavender, all I need is the chance. Some important man—where there will be crowds to see me. I'll do it publicly. Let them call me what they will. I have the power of life, and no one knows my secret. No one shall—until I am certain it does good for the entire world."

Cavender lit a cigarette with shaking fingers.

"Then you are going to take money for your work? You will charge fees, Doc? Do you realize what that means? You'll be the wealthiest man in the world. People will hand over their fortunes for a few more years of life. Let me in on it and I'll help you. I know just the way to handle it."

"I'm listening," Sutton said quietly.

Cavender jerked a thumb toward his embalming room.

"I'm no little guy in this business, understand? I handle my share of big jobs and one of the biggest is right in there now. Last night Bishop John Tyler died—of myocarditis. Heart trouble. I won't embalm the body. I'll set it up in his rectory. Hundreds of people will be there. Tyler was a good man—or should I say *is* a good man? Anyway you can get in easily and do your stuff. I'll have reporters there—all the publicity in the world. Within twelve hours, Doc, you'll be the most famous man the world has ever known. Men and women will crawl on their knees to you."

But Sutton recognized the craftiness in Cavender's tone and knew the undertaker was figuring himself

in. That must not be. Under no circumstances would Sutton administer his drug to any who came to plead with him. All he wanted was recognition of what he could accomplish. After that, authorities could set up a commission of some kind if they wished. They could decide who should be brought back to life.

MONEY? He would need some, true, but he had no ideas about garnering half the world's wealth for himself. A new laboratory, new experiments and new fame would be his reward. Sutton eyed Cavender narrowly as he nodded his agreement.

At eight-thirty that night Sutton had to battle his way through the crowds that filled the streets around the rectory. A guard of policemen supervised the crowd and kept them in line. Sutton touched his hypodermic kit and smiled. He would give them something to think about.

A burly patrolman escorted Sutton through the crowded room to where Cavender waited, wearing a professional, grave appearance. The corpse rested on a catafalque, dressed in the robes of his office. News photographers were clustered in one corner awaiting the arrival of important people. The air of the room was heavy with the scent of flowers.

The full realization of what he intended to do struck Sutton forcefully. He couldn't fail! But what would be the consequences? Would they be more than one human body and mind could bear? He had an impulse to rush out of the place, destroy his precious formula and all the amazing drug he had manufactured. It was not within the province of humanity to raise the dead.

Sutton grimly put the thought out of his mind. After all, doctors used adrenalin and brought patients out of veritable death. They operated, and men and women recovered who would otherwise have died. Why should he hesitate?

Cavender walked over to the bier and solemnly raised his hands.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said somberly, "you are gathered here to pay respects to a good man who did not deserve to die so soon. My name is Cavender. Last night a man came to life in my establishment. He arose from the dead at the ministrations of a friend of mine. Last night they scoffed at my story. Tonight there will be no doubts. Doctor Sutton—this way."

CHAPTER III

The Power That is His

SUTTON felt the blood drain out of his veins. The quiet that had reigned before Cavender's speech was a Babel compared to the silence now.

Photographers shifted their cameras for quick action. Sutton stepped up to where the body lay. As he looked down he felt almost as though the dead bishop were trying to tell him not to do this thing—not to interfere with powers that ruled the Universe. A million voices seemed to be crying, "No! No!"

Sutton banked flowers around the corpse to hide it from the view of the crowd. He surreptitiously drew out his needle, pulled back the vestments of the dead bishop, and his lips moved in a prayer as he inserted the needle. Then he stepped back.

Someone in the crowds screamed—a woman who couldn't stand the suspense or the utter gruesomeness of the act. She was led out of the room. Every eye was on the catafalque. Suddenly the bishop's lips began moving. One hand twitched and lifted about an inch.

Gasps of combined terror and disbelief swept through the crowd. But slowly the dead returned. The eyes opened, breathing began once more. A moan came from the bishop's throat.

Men and women dropped to their knees. Some looked apprehensively at Sutton. Then the news photographers came out of their lethargy, clustered around Sutton, taking pictures until he was almost blinded.

He headed into the crowd, ready to push them aside. But they parted for him, drew far back as if afraid.

In the street, reporters followed Sutton, clamoring for facts. He shook them off. He felt weary, exhausted. He saw a taxi at the curb and headed toward it. The driver suddenly ground gears and shot away from the curb. Sutton sighed deeply and turned around. He held up his hands for attention.

"What I have done is pure science," he said. "The secret lies within my brain and I shall not release it until I know it is for the common good. I have convinced you that I can raise the dead—under certain circumstances. I am willing to listen to any man, woman or child who wishes to see me, but I make no promises."

He began walking rapidly away, but there was no escape now. There was even a crowd around his laboratory when he reached it. But they were afraid of him. An air of mingled reverence and fear seemed to envelop him.

Sutton opened the door of his lab, stepped in and closed it again. He turned on the lights and sank into a soft, worn leather chair. He hadn't bargained for all this, but most certainly he had asked for it. As he caught a reflection of his pale features in a mirror he smiled a little. The world was his—if he wanted the world. Those people outside—there were thousands of them by now—would go down on their knees to him. He was a man for the ages!

For the ages! Something clicked in his mind. He was competing with Divine Providence. Scientist or not, he couldn't do a thing like that. Or could he?

Within his grasp lay all the riches he would wish for, all the homage to which mortal man could aspire. Did he want them? Why not? Others had vainly sought the same solution to this ageless problem, and only he had succeeded. Were not the plaudits of the world his to enjoy rightfully?

A superman? Not necessarily. What he had done was based on pure science. Few would believe that, but so long as he knew it was true, he would not be able to persuade himself that he was a Divine appointee. That nocturnal visit of a mythical goddess had been only a dream, of course.

The noise outside grew terrific. There was a pounding at his door. Sutton paid no attention to it. Never again would he be compelled to kowtow to ordinary mankind.

IN THE days that followed, this feeling became greater. Delegations of scientists waited upon him. Crowds practically lived on his doorstep. There was no cheering, just a respectful awe when he emerged. But when he ate, he ate alone. When he walked, he walked alone. He was shunned, yet worshiped.

Mail poured in, but he opened none of it. He had his phone disconnected. Cavender tried to see him, but the cordon of police outside his laboratory had orders that no one was to be admitted.

Cavender began making public statements, accusing Sutton of being a doublecrosser. Why didn't he use that power of his? People were dying every day—people who deserved to live. Why didn't he save them?

Something had to be done about all this. Sutton racked his tortured mind for an answer.

He became gaunt and hollow-eyed. Sleep was unknown. Even his waking hours were haunted with cries for his aid. Often there crept in two pallid faces—of Lawson who had killed himself, only to be brought back to life; and of a dead bishop who was now alive.

Sutton brought his forearm across his eyes hard to close out these faces. But they were in his mind. He could not shut them out. Sweating and tossing, Sutton cursed the moment when a dying man had given him the secret over death. He longed for the solitude he had enjoyed so many years. It was all gone now, replaced by frantic faces, clamoring voices, a horrible din that could drive a man mad.

On the fourth morning Sutton threw open the double doors of his laboratory and stepped out on the small porch. Instantly the unruly crowd subsided.

"I have a statement to make," Sutton said in a ringing voice. "There have been accusations that I am keeping my secret to myself in order to derive huge rewards for bringing the dead back to life. Cavender has indicated that I seek nothing but money, that I am holding back deliberately.

"That distinctly is not true. Until I am positive that what I know will benefit every one of you, the secret remains locked in my mind. Meanwhile I shall listen to those who want my aid.

"There are certain conditions over which I have no power. Within the next few hours I shall release a statement couched in scientific language. Those of you who seek my help can be assured from your doctor whether or not that help lies within my power. As for fees—there are none. Such a gift as I possess belongs to the world and one day it shall be public property. Now I ask that all of you go away. Give me some peace and quiet. I—"

A girl of about twenty was trying to push her way through the crowd. Sutton saw her and raised his hand.

"Let that girl through. She is a friend of mine."

WHAT scores of patrolmen could not accomplish, that raised hand of Sutton's did. The throng drew back to allow the girl to advance. She came upon the porch and extended her hand impulsively. It dropped suddenly and she backed away as if afraid.

Sutton smiled at her warmly.

"Helen, there is nothing to fear. I'm just the same as before. And I'm glad you came, terribly glad. If what I have done proves beneficial, the credit for it belongs to your father. Professor Varick taught me everything I know."

"It—it's about Father that I came," the girl said, but came no closer. "He wants to see you. He's terribly sick, Roger. Will you come?"

Without answering, Sutton entered the house, donned hat and coat and emerged again. Helen drew back as he approached, but gradually she regained confidence. Her coupé was at the curb three blocks up the street. That was the closest she had been able to drive.

"I think Father is dying," she said in a low voice. "And he insists he must talk to you. Oh Roger, what have you done? I—I used to like you. Now I'm afraid. Horribly afraid! It isn't natural to do what you—have—done."

Sutton smiled. "Nonsense! Your father could have done the same thing. He won't be afraid of me. Perhaps I can do something for him."

"No!" The girl sounded almost hysterical. "Not that—not that! You mustn't!"

When Sutton walked into Professor Varick's house the servants kept out of his way. Two doctors eyed him with almost open animosity and proffered no greeting. He ran up the stairs to the sick room and Professor Varick's sharp-featured, angular wife got up hastily from the chair beside the bed. She looked at Sutton, gave a strangled scream, and rushed out of the room. Even she was afraid of him.

Sutton walked over and sat down in the chair she had occupied. The man on the bed was old. His breathing was labored and Sutton knew the signs. In an hour or two he'd go into a coma and then—peaceful death.

"Roger"—Professor Varick's lips barely moved—"I had to see you. You have done a horrible thing, did you know that? You have taken power into your hands that shouldn't be. For years we worked together. You have respected me. I'm dying, Roger. I know when my time has come. But you—there are years yet before you will die. Don't go on with this ghastly thing. Drop it—destroy whatever formula you have concocted. You will never find peace, Roger. You will become hated and

feared. You will walk alone, always."

"I can't," Sutton said softly. "What I have discovered belongs to humanity and it shall be theirs. Furthermore, I am now in a position to do my first good deed. You will return to life, Professor Varick. It will be interesting to talk to a man of science who has died and returned."

"No!" Varick said hoarsely. "No, Roger! Do you hear me? I'll curse you. I'll—"

His words became a strangled gasp as he fell back. Sutton placed a professional finger on his pulse, felt it slowly die away until Varick's agony-torn body became limp in death.

Sutton took out his hypodermic needle. He made the necessary injection, saw the first signs of returning life and left the house before Varick recovered consciousness.

Why had Professor Varick fought so strenuously against being brought to life again. Any man should welcome the chance. Had he wanted to die? Of course not. Varick was one of the most brilliant scientists of his day. There was much work he could do yet. And now Varick should know how to handle this strange power over death. Sutton would give him the secret.

SUTTON'S face was glowing when he entered his lab again. The crowd outside had thinned to a handful. He strode into the small study adjoining the lab, turned on the lights and sat down.

Mail was piled up in unbelievable quantity. He picked up several envelopes, slit them open, and read the impassioned appeals for his aid. One contained a certified check for ten thousand dollars. Sutton ripped the check into small pieces and flung them into his basket.

There were similar propositions in other envelopes. Money enough to make him a millionaire overnight, but he resolutely destroyed all but fees in cash. These he slipped into envelopes and addressed them to the senders.

Something crashed inside the laboratory. Sutton got up swiftly, found a pair of fireplace tongs and with these as weapons, he stepped into the lab and snapped on the lights. And suddenly he felt the first twinge of real fear that he had ever experienced.

A man was half crouched, like some animal, in one corner of the large room. His arms were extended, his hands like talons. His lips were drawn back in a bestial snarl and his eyes were alight with madness. Arthur Lawson, the suicide Sutton had brought back to life!

"Why, Lawson," he said, "what's wrong? What's the matter?"

Lawson came forward warily. "What's the matter, you ask? I was dead—willingly so. You brought me back, and for what? Only so I can die again. It took all my nerve to jump into the river and I was glad when it was over, but you had to spoil it. Now I can't do it again. I haven't the courage, and I'm doomed, I tell you, doomed!"

"Nonsense," Sutton declared. "Compose yourself, man. I brought you back with a drug that caused your blood to flow again, to stimulate every organ in your body. It was purely scientific. You won't suffer any further trouble."

"Do you think so?" Lawson asked. "You—with your potions and your needles! You gave me a few weeks more to live, and they'll be agonizing. Already I'm beginning to go blind. Then the pain will come. The pain, do you hear? That's why I tried to kill myself. Well, I'll damn you with every breath of my body until there isn't any more. I'll continue to damn you in death! Why don't you shoot me? Or crush my skull with those tongs? That would be something I'd appreciate. But no—you can only bring dead people back to life. I hope you die as slowly as I'm dying, Sutton! I hope every known agony will contort your body! I—I—"

He gave a wild scream, flung himself past Sutton and vanished through the window.

Sutton sat down slowly. He shook

his head. Of course this was no fault of his. How could he have known?

He picked up a late evening paper and his eyes rested for a moment on an ugly face on the front page. Joseph Breen was the name, and he was to be electrocuted at midnight. Most of the rest of the front page was devoted to stories of Sutton and his activities.

Despite Lawson, Sutton began to feel expansive. Perhaps this was all planned by Divine Providence. Perhaps he was meant to do this work. Perhaps he even was Divine in some slight sense of the word. He might find the world a fine place to live in after all.

CHAPTER IV

The Condemned Lives

MIDNIGHT was near when someone tapped gently on Roger Sutton's door. He opened it and admitted a girl. She was no more than twenty-three and wore a cheap scarf wrapped around the blondest hair Sutton had ever seen. Her eyes were red from weeping and she looked at him with reverence and awe.

"You won't put me out?" she asked fearfully.

"Of course not. Come in and sit down, near the fire. You must be cold. What can I do to help you?"

She shivered as the heat struck her. Sutton found that he was admiring the girl. She looked so wholesome and plain, and she was also beautiful. Her supple, lithe figure bent toward him. She placed one hand on his wrist.

"Doctor Sutton, you can help me. But I can't pay you. I—I've been outside almost all day trying to get nerve enough to come in. You see, my brother is very sick. He's going to die—soon. And he's so young. Can you help me? Will you help me? He's all I have left."

Sutton took both her hands and held them tightly. All his life he had been too busy for women and now he was glad of it. This girl fulfilled his every idea of what a woman should be. Love had been alien to him, but love quickly grew now.

"He's dying of heart trouble," she said. "There—isn't a chance."

"Then I can help you," Sutton told her. "Leave me your address. I'll be over before morning. Depend on me."

He held her hand tightly for a moment. Then she half smiled, half cried as she left. Sutton's heart beat high. Now his world would be complete. She was drawn to him as he had been to her. Perhaps, soon, he could tell her this.

He looked out of the window set high in the door. Two baleful, hate-filled eyes stared back at him. Sutton turned away and shivered. Lawson had meant it when he said he'd haunt him. Sutton's lips froze in a bitter smile. Haunted by a man who had been dead and now lived. It was ghastly.

He went into the lab. Here no awed stares, no pleading voices could disturb his thoughts. Here he could work unmolested. But tonight work did not appeal. He kept thinking of the girl. "Mary Carrol" she had written on a slip of paper. The address was near the riverfront.

He checked the amount of life-giving fluid he had left and decided against making any more. If anything happened to him, his secret would die also. It was better that way, for in the hands of an unscrupulous man—like Cavender's for instance—it might become a dangerous weapon.

Sutton did not feel sleepy. He was nervous, for no reason. He felt as though the whole world were ready to tumble upon him. He started when someone tapped on the window of the lab. Sutton frowned. Who would be coming here at this hour? And why, by the window, instead of the front door.

He went to the window, and saw Professor Varick's strained, bloodless face staring at him. It was a dead face, yet it lived. The eyes were in deep, hollow sockets, but

they were afire. His voice was strained with terror.

"Roger—let me in! Hurry! They're after me."

SUTTON aided the older man into the lab, helped him to a chair and frowned. Was this drug making maniacs of his subjects?

"Roger!" Varick quavered. "Roger, I—I killed her! My wife! I've hated her for twenty years—hated her enough to slit her lying, shrewish throat a million times. But tonight—after you awakened me from death—I couldn't fight against the urge. Roger, I slit her throat as calmly as I'd wash out a test tube. And I can't even see how it was wrong now. The police are after me. If they find me here—well, there are chemicals and poisons enough in here to dispose of a few of them. You'll help me, won't you?"

He clawed at Sutton's coat lapels, a gibbering maniac.

"Listen to me!" Sutton shouted. "What do you mean—you don't see how it was wrong? Murder is always wrong."

Varick leaned forward, sweat rolling in tiny drops down his wan face. There was fever in his eyes, his bony, almost transparent hands shook violently.

"Roger, I—I don't know. I tell you the impulse has always been there. I killed her. There's no remorse. Do you know what I think? That during my few moments of death something left me. Call it a soul if you will. Call it anything, but right now I'd cheerfully kill you if you refuse to help me. Get me guns! Prepare cylinders of gas. The most poisonous substance we can concoct. I'll wipe out every man who tries to capture me!"

Sutton felt his lips go dry and his heart pound furiously. Was this the reward of his work? To have men return from the dead to find they had lost their souls? That they couldn't distinguish between right and wrong? Professor Varick, as quiet and peaceful a man as ever had lived, now was an insane killer. And the elderly scientist had never been able to inject a guinea pig without wincing.

"You must compose yourself, Professor," Sutton said. "Tell the police the truth, how you suffered all these years. Tell them anything, but don't kill anyone else!"

Varick's hollow eyes grew even brighter.

"I have it, Roger! I'll declare that my soul is somewhere in space, that I am a dead man, legally and rightfully. What can they do to me? Perhaps they will send me to a sanitarium. I won't stay there long. I've been thinking. There are other people I don't like. Now I can take whatever revenge I wish and without fear! I'll never be able to thank you enough for bringing me back."

"Professor!" Sutton shouted. "You can't do that! Tell them—"

Sutton hesitated. Tell them what? That this drug which brought dead men back to life turned them into maniacal beasts without either conscience or the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and to know no remorse? It was unthinkable! That drug was not meant for such things! There was now only one thing for him to do.

Sutton walked slowly over to the lab bench, opened a drawer and fussed with test tubes inside it. He picked up a sterilized hypo, covertly filled it with a violent poison. He approached Varick, hiding the needle behind him.

"Of course, you don't mean what you say, Professor. You can't defend yourself that way, because that would mean that my secret, instead of being beneficial to mankind, is a horrible, insidious thing. I'm only beginning, Professor. You, above all people, wouldn't ruin my chances now."

"Wouldn't I?" Varick declared slyly. "I'd do any damned thing that would help me out of this mess. What do I care if your precious secret is blasted to bits—and you with it? You've given me life and I'm using it to ferret out those who have harmed me in the past. I can kill them all without the slightest fear of the law. I'm a dead man!"

"Yes," Sutton said gently. "Yes, Professor, you are a dead man."

He suddenly jabbed the needle forward and into Varick's neck. The powerful alkaloid reacted swiftly. Varick's over-bright eyes turned dull. His body sagged, and flopped out of the chair. He was dead before he hit the floor. Sutton hurriedly carried the corpse to a large locker and stuffed it inside. He carefully cleaned the hypo and replaced it in the drawer. Then he sat down to think.

Had Varick gone mad from the shock of being brought back to life? Perhaps the fluid had been injected too soon.

Lawson's actions were more easily accounted for. He had wanted to die and resented being brought back.

"The bishop!" Sutton jumped to his feet. "He, of all people, would be doing fine. He certainly would have no homicidal mania, or not be able to distinguish between right and wrong."

The bishop would reassure him. Sutton raced for the door, picking up his hat and coat on the way.

The jangle of the phone brought him to a skidding halt. He turned back. It was Mary Carrol.

"He—he's dead," she said tremulously. "Died just a few moments ago. Will you come—quickly?"

"I'll be there in twenty minutes," Sutton declared.

The bishop could wait. Here was a chance to do some real good with his drug. He hailed a taxi, gave the address and as he had expected, found the place to be dirty and ramshackle.

But if the surroundings were squalid, Mary's face was winsome and pretty. She was waiting on the sidewalk, wringing her hands.

She sped straight into his arms and he held her closely for a moment. Then she thrust him away and hurried into the building. They climbed three flights of narrow, dirty stairs to a cheaply furnished room where a dead man lay on the bed.

Sutton hesitated. What if he brought this man back and he also turned into a maniac without a soul? Would that help Mary? He turned to her and she clutched his arm tightly.

"Please!" she begged softly. "Please—help me! You can bring Joe back to life. Please. . . ."

AS SUTTON filled the hypo from the tiny vial he noticed that he would be using the last few drops of the drug. But he could manufacture more within two hours. He bent over the corpse and glanced at the man's face. It seemed vaguely familiar, but he certainly looked nothing like Mary.

He thrust the needle home, pressed the plunger and slowly withdrew the instrument. As he moved back, his elbow brushed against the man's trouser leg. It was slit open to the knee and he saw a horrible burn on the flesh.

He turned the dead man's head slightly and horror crept into his heart. There was a shaven spot—blackened from electrodes. He knew then why the man's face had seemed familiar. This was Joe Breen, the murderer who had been electrocuted this night!

Sutton's face was grim as he drew himself erect and turned around. The girl stood near the door, with a gun in her hand. Two men who had quietly slipped into the room also held guns. On the bed, Breen groaned and twitched as life returned.

"Thanks, sucker," the girl said with a wide smile.

Gentle Mary Carrol had vanished and in her place stood a gangster moll, a woman who could kill as easily as Varick had done. Her companions were the same type.

"Mary—" Sutton began.

"Stow it," she rapped out. "I had to play up to you to get you to do this. Well it's over now. That man ain't no brother of mine. He's my husband. But I didn't lie, sweetheart. I said he was going to die. He was! We paid plenty to get his body out of the prison morgue an hour or two ago before they could do an autopsy on him."

"Take care of him," one of the thugs growled. "Can't you see he's comin' out of it? Say, Doc, that's

wonderful stuff you got and don't think Joe ain't goin' to appreciate this. Why, with you workin' for us, we'd never have to be afraid. They could burn us, and all you'd have to do is slip us some of that stuff."

A gun pressed against Sutton's spine. He turned back toward the bed, heartsick. The murderer was sitting up, trying to get his bearings. Slowly, realization of what had happened seeped through his slanting skull. He grinned broadly.

"I—ain't dead no more?" he asked. "Say, ain't that—somethin'? Hello, Mollie! Boy, you sure look good to me. I—I ain't feelin' so hot—"

"You'll be all right in a few moments," Sutton assured him. "Now that my work is done, I must leave. You won't need me any more."

"Aw, wait a while," the girl coaxed. "Listen, Doc, you got something there. It's worth millions if it's handled right. Work with us and you won't be sorry. How about it?"

Contempt was in Sutton's eyes as he looked squarely into the eyes of the girl.

"If I had to die for it, you know, I wouldn't touch your proposition. Let me out of here."

One of the men moved forward. He slapped Sutton across the face until the scientist's face bled freely.

"That'll teach you to treat ladies right," he growled. "When Molly wants you in on somethin', be a gent and say okay. Now keep your mitts high while I take that bottle of stuff outa your pocket."

CHAPTER V

Eternity

CONSUMING rage possessed Sutton as he spat blood.

"For once you're fooled," he snapped. "There isn't a drop of the drug left—not enough to analyze even if a man lived who could do such a thing. There are no formulas—"

But there was a formula and the thug's prowling fingers found it. The chemical symbols meant nothing to him, but he also knew that to a trained mind they would signify everything. Sutton felt his throat go dry.

"So there ain't no formula," the thug snarled. "What's this—a laundry ticket? Listen, pal, we're takin' you back to that place of yours and you'll make up a batch of this stuff while we watch. The first phony play and you get it. Don't be a sap. String along with us and you'll be okay."

"Joe can make it," the girl said. "He's able to sit up. We'll get out of here and go to this sap's laboratory. The cops would never think of looking for us there."

Sutton knew he was at the mercy of this gang—until he got them where he wanted them. He'd killed once already tonight, and four more wouldn't make much difference, especially when there was no other way to protect his secret. He smiled wryly as the car headed toward his lab. The life-giving drug had turned him into a killer too, and he hadn't absorbed any of it.

But these people had to die. It was a just, deserved sentence, for so long as they lived his secret would be endangered. All the good he might do with it would be wasted, while swine such as this quartette would grow fat on the income it would provide. Some day people would understand—if it was ever found out.

Joe had almost fully recovered by the time the car pulled into a driveway beside Sutton's home. But there was no gratitude in his make-up. He proffered no thanks and he handled a gun as though he would like to use it—on Sutton's heart.

Sutton opened the lab door, turned on the lights and the girl ran over to the windows and pulled down the shades.

"Okay," Joe snarled. "Let's go. Doc, you make up a batch of that stuff. Just as much as you can, see? We'll peddle it right. Sure, you come in on the cut—a good-sized one, too—but I'm boss, see? If some big shot wants somebody brought back to life, we do it and collect—plenty.

It's the best racket in the world and nobody'll dare stop us because if they do, you and the formula go blooey. There ain't no more stuff. Catch on? People will croak and stay dead."

"All right," Sutton said dispiritedly. "I'll do it, but first I must make a phone call. Oh, I'm not calling the police. I can't very well do that, because I killed a man tonight."

Joe gave him a contemptuous grimace. "What kind of a line is that, Doc? We ain't saps. If you bumped off a guy, where's the stiff? And what you got to worry about anyhow? All you got to do is give him a shot of the stuff and he snaps out of it. They can't burn you when the corpse is walking around, can they?"

"The body"—Sutton jerked his head toward the cupboard—"is there. Look if you wish."

Joe did and returned with a new light in his eyes.

"Now ain't that somethin'!" he gloated. "We don't even have to keep a rod trained on you, Doc. If you don't toe the line, we just call the cops and tip 'em about this bump-off. Now what's this about a phone call?"

SUTTON sat down behind his small desk.

"I'm not sure about the action of this drug. I've only awakened four people so far. One of them is that man in the cupboard. I killed him—because he went mad. I don't want the same thing to happen to you, now that we're in partnership. The phone call is to contact Bishop Tyler, whom I brought back from the dead. I just want to check symptoms and the general state of his health."

"Sure," Joe said. "Why not? You won't call the cops because it'll be just like planking yourself into the chair. Go ahead. I don't want to go screwy. Find out how the bishop is."

Sutton dialed the number. Apparently one of the bishop's aides answered.

"The bishop is dead, sir," the aide told Sutton. "I'm sorry to say that he took his own life about two hours ago. We don't know exactly what happened, but he seemed to have gone mad."

Sutton hung up slowly.

"Well?" Joe asked. "Are you sure he's okay?"

Sutton nodded dully. "Yes. A little tired—so don't over exert yourself, Joe. Remember, you were stone dead."

Joe gulped and turned a trifle pale. Then he forced a grin.

"Let's get the stuff cookin', huh? A nice big batch of it, Doc."

Sutton donned his white laboratory coat, walked over to a long bench and set up four tripods. He placed Bunsen burners beneath each one and a large beaker over the flames. He poured a colorless solution into each from an unlabelled bottle, then dropped what seemed to be four small eggs into the solution. Three other chemicals, in powder form, went into the beakers, then he turned around and faced the watching quartette.

"I'll need your help," he said. "Watch those beakers—the glass jars I'm heating the stuff in. When the liquid turns pink, each one of you handle a beaker. There are glass stirring rods on the bench. That liquid must be stirred continuously. The instant it turns from pink to red, bend close and wait until it begins to turn purple. At that instant call me. I'll be preparing the other ingredients."

The four nodded, eager to help in this plot that was bound to net them millions. Sutton walked over to the far end of the laboratory, raised the sliding cover of a huge gas eliminating chamber and stuck his head inside. Pure fresh air greeted his nostrils and he could watch the four while they industriously stirred up a death potion.

Joe dropped first, probably weakened by his recent ordeals. One of the thugs collapsed next, then the girl. The last of the killers suddenly realized they had been tricked. He drew a gun and his finger started to squeeze the trigger. But he was breathing hard, each inhalation carrying more of the deadly gas into his lungs. His knees buckled and he fell, his heavy body jarring the laboratory.

Sutton took a long breath of fresh air, darted across the room and turned on a big fan. The poison gas was quickly sucked out. He sat down in one of the chairs and eyed the four crumpled figures.

"Five," he muttered. "Five have died by my hand. Four were raised from the dead. Two of them I was forced to kill to protect myself and the world. Another took his own life. The fourth lives a living death, cursing me with every breath. Can I call that success?"

HE PACED the laboratory floor for an hour, trying to figure a way out. Then he walked out into the cool night air and climbed behind the wheel of the car in which he had been brought home. He sent it racing toward the outskirts.

The powerful motor began to labor and he was aware that he was climbing. Then he remembered—this was the road beside Death Precipice. That would be a good place to avoid in his present state of mind. He wanted to get away from death and all that it meant.

He saw the side road loom up in the glare of the headlamps. He pressed harder on the foot pedal, but mysteriously the car began to slow He felt the wheel turn without any volition of his own. It was pointing the car into the lane that ended on the brink of the highest precipice in the state.

Sutton fought the wheel, but he might as well have battered at a stone wall. But he had to stop or go over the brink. He transferred his foot to the brake pedal. The car slowed and stopped. His hand moved to the light switch and turned it. Sutton wondered why he did that.

He found himself walking along a narrow, treacherous trail. To his left loomed mountainous country. To his right a two-foot strip of rocky land and then—empty space. He shuddered, but he didn't turn away. His mind was reeling under the load it carried. He had murdered five people—not that they hadn't deserved to die. It was for mankind's benefit that he had killed.

But those others—to whom he had granted life. Only one was left. What had made Varick go mad? Why had the bishop taken his own life? Sutton stared into darkness. He could see their faces, all four of them. Varick, Lawson, Bishop Tyler—and Joe, the murderer. They floated like eerie, phosphorescent ghosts before him.

"I've been wrong!" he moaned. "It is not for a mere mortal to grant life where death has already struck. I must have been mad—mad!"

He paced up and down for half an hour, and gradually a solution crept through his tortured brain. The formula had to be destroyed—and with it, himself.

Then he remembered—one of the thugs had taken the formula from him. A hideous fear assailed him. What if someone had discovered those four bodies and found the formula? He and the formula must perish at the same moment. He had

to go back and get it. There were corrosive acids in the lab to destroy that paper. There were poisons to still his own brain and tongue. It had to be! There was no alternative.

"Roger Sutton!"

He swiveled around at the sound of his own name called in a calm, musical voice. He had heard it before. Hera, goddess of Life! He hadn't been dreaming then.

"Who is there?" he asked. "I can't see anyone."

Something white fluttered along the ground. Sutton picked it up and suddenly there was no more fear. With hands that were amazingly steady, he swiftly found matches, applied flame and let the paper drop to the ground.

A squall had sprung up and he could smell the ocean, a mile away. Tall grass was whipped by the wind, his hair tumbled around his face. But that burning bit of paper might as well have been composed of solid lead. The flame was as quiet as that of a candle in a secluded, airless room. Slowly the flame died away, seemingly withdrawn by some invisible hand. When the last ember died out, Sutton ground the ashes into the earth.

SUTTON raised both arms in an appeal to something he couldn't see. "Now what shall I do?" he said aloud.

"Roger Sutton," the same quiet voice came out of the darkness, "there is but one thing for you. An error was made. I granted you a power that mortal man should never possess. The dead must remain dead for they have slipped into another world. A pleasant world, Roger Sutton. One of which you should not be afraid. You're not afraid, are you? Remember what I told you? That Death would be watching jealously? He is at your side now."

Sutton shook his head. "No, I am not afraid. What I had hoped to make mankind's greatest benefaction turned into vast peril. Such knowledge is not for human minds to hold. So long as I exist, the formula lives on. With my death, it is gone. Even if you withdrew the power to instil that one ingredient, I should always be afraid."

He walked slowly over to the edge of the precipice. He knew how deep it was and the jagged rocks that lay on the bottom. But he stepped off the edge with a prayer on his lips, a clear mind and his heart filled with a song. Wind rushed by him.

But there was something else. He felt an invisible arm encompass his waist. The soft, reassuring voice spoke gently.

"You are a brave man, Roger Sutton. Oblivion waits below, but only for an instant, and there will be no pain. There will be only a sudden release."

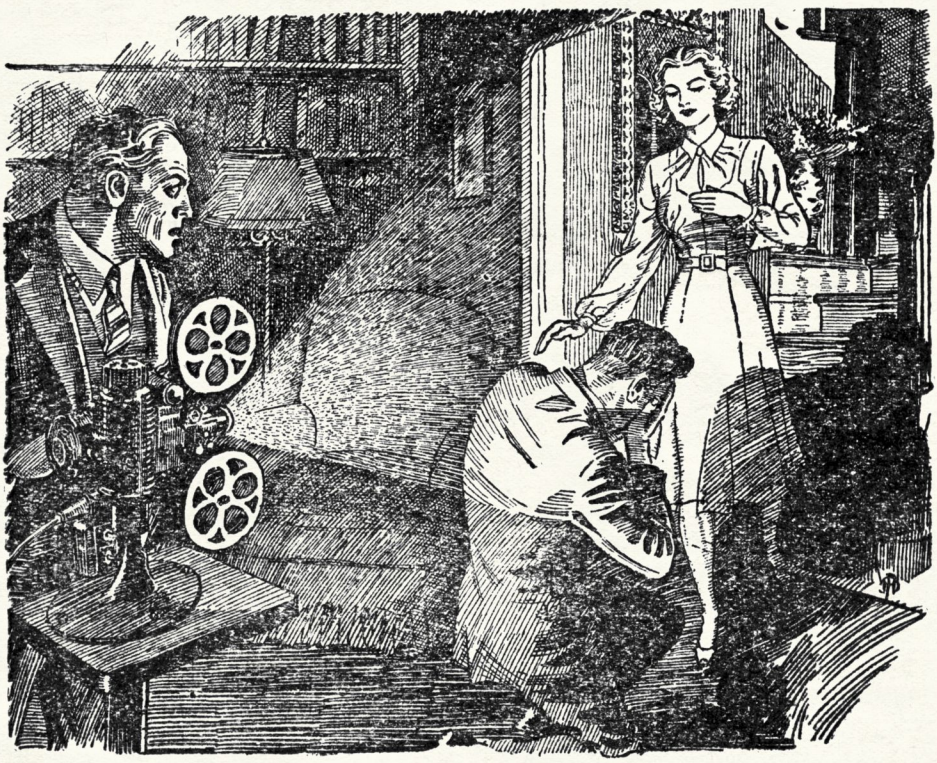
"And then I will see you?" Sutton asked and marveled at the calmness with which he spoke.

"You will see me, Roger Sutton. In an instant now. Ah! . . . It wasn't difficult, was it? Come—eternity awaits you."

SHADOWS

By ARCH CARR

Author of "Wanderer of the Void," etc.



The girl stepped from the screen into the room

Fate Casts Strange Images Upon a Screen Where Souls Are Mysteriously United Both In Life and Death!

I AM old Bill Hutchins, a hard-boiled, unimaginative cop, captain of the homicide crew. I've seen violent death in every conceivable form, I suppose, in the thirty years I've spent on the force. I've gazed upon decapitated corpses, bodies burned and mutilated beyond recognition, victims of bullet and knife.

But these sights have never given me a shudder, have never caused the slightest stir of emotion within me. To me they were merely something that came up in the course of the day's work, something to be routinely investigated and promptly forgotten.

Then too, I've never taken any stock in the hereafter. I've never given two minutes' thought to a vague life beyond the grave. I've always left such things to the superstitiously inclined. Death, I figured, wrote an end to every living thing.

But now I know better. Something has happened which has convinced me beyond any doubt that there is an-

other life beyond death. Just what sort of an existence it is I do not know—yet.

Many years ago, when I first joined the force, my sweetheart, Jane Royden, died suddenly just a week before we were to have been married. Bitterness crept into my heart. I became morose, taciturn to the point of sourness. My Jane was gone forever, I believed. I'd never see her again.

I lived in dreary solitude until John came to stay with me.

JOHN was a street waif, without home or parents, just lately out of an orphanage. He sold newspapers for a living and slept nights in discarded crates and boxes in alleys. I found him almost frozen, one winter night, and hauled him to the hospital. When he recovered sufficiently to be discharged, I took him home with me. Later I made him my legally adopted son.

I have never had cause to regret my action. John made me a devoted son, partially filling the aching void in my heart. I put him through high school and college, made a physician of him. Upon completing his internship in one of the city's best hospitals, he accepted a position on the staff of the institution.

Time passes—two, three years. John became a surgeon of wide renown, was much sought after. Then he married Patricia Gahagen, as pretty an Irish lass as the sun ever shone on. She was good, lovable, reminded me constantly of my own lost Jane. We were happy, the three of us, living in our cottage in the suburbs.

But our happiness was of short duration. I was busy with three murder cases the afternoon the sergeant called me to take the phone. It was the hospital. Patricia had been struck by a hit-and-run driver who had not halted to view the havoc he had wrought.

The surgeons, John's associates, were even then preparing to operate in an effort to save Pat's life.

The best driver on the force whirled me through the city streets to the hospital. John met me in the corridor of an upper floor, a wild light in his eyes, an instrument case under his arm.

"She's dead, Dad!" he cried. "Pat's dead! The so-called surgical science that has saved so many lives has failed me—now, when I needed it most." He turned and sent his case crashing through a window. "I'm through. Through with it all. Never again shall my two hands be lifted in the cause of humanity."

He did not then realize the truth of his statement. Those slim, skillful hands of his never touch another instrument.

We laid Pat's poor little broken body to rest beneath a giant elm in Riverside Cemetery. John's grief knew no bounds. The horror of Pat's passing ripped his heart out, tore it to shreds with steel-shod talons.

I finally persuaded him to leave her grave and we went sorrowfully back to a home that was no longer a home. It was now a grim, hulking reminder of the loved one who was gone. Gone forever, I believed.

John did not return to the hospital. He remained in seclusion, as the weeks passed. He became thin, gaunt, ate barely enough to keep his body alive. My anxiety for him mounted. He wasn't snapping out of it as he should have.

PAT had been dead little more than a month when John said to me: "Dad, I made a moving picture of Pat a few days before—before her accident. I had the film developed today. Will you see it on the screen with me tonight?"

"I wouldn't do that now, John," I objected. "It would be too much like, well, like losing her all over again. Wait a little longer, until you don't feel her loss so acutely. That will be time enough to see her pictures. You've got to snap back to yourself, son, and carry on. People need you, need a surgeon with your skill. Pat wouldn't want you to quit. You know that. Life has to go on, regardless of individual suffering."

But he brushed my reasoning aside.

"I've got to see her," he said tonelessly.

So, shortly after dinner, he affixed

a beaded glass screen to the wall of the library and set up a small electrically-driven projector on the table. After the film was threaded through the gears of the machine, John snapped off the lights and started the motor.

The screen changed from silver to black and a picture grew thereon, a picture of the stairway that leads up from the hall of our home. I waited tensely. I wanted, as John did, to see a moving picture of Patricia—and yet I didn't. It meant, simply, the reopening of an old wound.

He stood there in the semi-darkness beside me. I could feel his body trembling, could hear his jerky breathing. He shifted nervously from foot to foot.

"Look!" he muttered hoarsely.

I looked and there was Pat, smiling. She was coming down the stairs wearing her favorite afternoon frock. Something choked up into my throat, spilled burningly into the corners of my eyes. It was too much, seeing this motion picture of the girl so soon after we had buried her. I turned to leave the room. I couldn't take it. At the door I stopped, looked back.

Pat had descended the stairs and was walking slowly along the hall. Her picture loomed life-size on the screen as she came toward the door. I couldn't go out of the room then. Something held me. There wouldn't be much more to see, I told myself. The film would run out soon.

John uttered a choking cry, ran and dropped to his knees before the screen, his hands outstretched.

"Pat, honey!" he cried piteously. "Why did you have to leave me, Pat? Why?"

He hid his face in his hands and great, wrenching sobs shook his emaciated body. This was what I had feared. It is not pleasant to see a man go to pieces in grief, so I stalked across the room and reached for the projector switch. I flicked a last glance at the screen as I did so.

GREAT God! Patricia's picture was no longer on that screen. It had come down off the wall into the room, was standing beside John. But it wasn't a picture, a shadow now. It was Patricia, herself! Not the Patricia I had known in this life—there was something ethereal about her, something different, something that spoke of another distant world, another life.

John looked up, an expression of utter incredulity, of sheer joy, upon his tear-streaked face. Pat placed her hand on his shoulder, said something which I couldn't hear and motioned toward the screen. John got to his feet and, together, they moved toward the wall in the beam of the projector. There was an instant of blurred indistinction—then Pat and John were both on that screen, were both flickering shadows in that picture.

They passed swiftly along the hall, mounted the stairs. At the turn they halted and waved to me, before climbing upward and out of the picture frame. Then, just in the split-second before the film ran out and the white light of the projector's lamp bathed the screen, they were gone.

I snapped the switch and ran from the library. In my own room I dropped heavily into a chair. My nerves were shattered; my heart hammered at my ribs, threatened to burst my chest apart. Perspiration bathed my body.

I became calmer, after a time, and tried to reason the thing out. But there was no reasoning to be done. It had happened just as I had seen it happen. I knew that. And I have no imagination. I see only cold, stark fact.

I realized then that somehow, in some way, I had seen something which few living persons have ever seen—the soul of a man going out to join that of his loved one in another world. A miraculous, yet inevitable union.

I knew then what I'd find when I went back into the library. I found John's body lying on the floor beneath the screen, the troubled features now relaxed in the deep, ageless peace of eternity. There were no marks on the body, nothing to indicate the cause of death.

Heart failure, due to overpowering grief, some physician might say. Per-

sonally, I knew John died of pure joy. And I'm letting it go at that, satisfied in my own mind. I am only too glad that he has found happiness again. I wish that I had gone on with my Jane thirty years ago, now that I know death is not the end.

I don't know why I have written all this. Probably it's because I need an outlet for my thoughts. Certainly, I have not written so that others may read. For I dare not tell what has happened in this house tonight, not even to my old friend, Sergeant Conley, who is an avowed spiritualist.

I wanted an hour alone with John —and I have spent that hour in writing, in gazing upon my adopted son's serene, dead face. Now I must put this aside. There are things which must be attended to.

But no! A thought has suddenly come to me. That film! If I were to project it upon the screen again, would I see only Patricia in the picture—as it was originally photographed? Or would John be there with her now? I am determined to see.

STATEMENT by Sergeant Conley:

When Captain Hutchins had failed to report for duty in twenty-four hours, and there was no response to our phone calls, the chief directed me to drive out to the captain's home and investigate. We were frankly worried, for it was not like Hutchins to be away from his desk without giving a reason for his absence.

The Hutchins home was locked and I forced an entrance at one of the library windows. In this room, on the table, I found the foregoing manuscript, which was written in the captain's notebook in his own handwriting. Also, on the table, was a small home-movie projector with its light burning and motor running, the film all wound off onto the receiving reel.

Nor is that all I found. The bodies of Captain Bill Hutchins and his adopted son, John, were lying side by side on the floor beneath the movie screen. On each face was an expression of peace. The bodies were cold and stiff, the process of *rigor mortis* complete.

For reasons of my own, I hid the manuscript and reel of film before I called in the homicide boys.

The medical examiner, after an autopsy had been performed, stated that death had been caused by heart failure in both instances. And he swore that it was the first time he had ever heard of two men dying of heart failure together, at approximately the same time.

Thus was the matter passed over. But the M. E. was never satisfied with his own findings.

I often wonder what Bill Hutchins saw when he put that picture on the screen. Did he see John, and possibly his own dead sweetheart, Jane Royden, there with Patricia? I wonder.

Some day I am going to see that picture myself. For I am alone in the world, and am growing old now—and old Bill Hutchins was my best friend.

Love and Life Come at Last to McCumber—but He Discovers That Redemption Is Only for the Damned!

McCumber saw fear in her eyes

DOOMED

By SEABURY QUINN

Author of "The Lesser Brethren Mourn," "The Phantom Farmhouse," etc.

MCCUMBER folded his newspaper and choked back a yawn as the subway train slid into Borough Hall station. He was dog-tired. But the item he had just read in the paper disturbed him. He almost forgot that it was nearly midnight and that he'd been working like a horse since eight that morning.

GOVERNOR REFUSES COMMUTATION

Central City, June 13—Gov. Chas. B. Oglesby today refused to commute Olga Wheatley's death sentence to life impris-

onment. Women's clubs in all sections of the country have forwarded petitions for clemency to the capital, but the chief executive stood firm in his expressed determination to let the law take its course.

On the night of January 22, the twenty-year-old blond factory operative, who had "never had a date," went to dinner with a girl friend and two traveling salesmen who picked the girls up near the factory entrance. When she returned home after ten o'clock, after having taken in a movie with her friend and the young men, her stepfather, Fred Hatton, forty-eight and a widower, gave her a lashing with his belt. According to her testimnoy at her trial, he "called her bad names."

Still smarting from the flogging and harboring resentment, the girl crept into his room after her stepfather had gone to sleep. She beat him to death with a hammer as he lay in bed. Then she walked to police headquarters and gave herself up.

She admitted the killing in court and repeatedly declared she would do the same thing again under like circumstances. The jury, composed for the most part of factory workers with daughters of their own, brought in a verdict of murder in the first degree after deliberating less than half an hour. Such verdicts make the death sentence mandatory.

WHY, he wondered, should the obscure item buried on page six among the white sale ads, affect him so strongly? Murder was no rare occurrence in present-day America, nor were sentences and executions, if the guilty parties were obscure and poor. He shrugged his shoulders in slight irritation. Probably exhaustion. Little things get you down when you're tired, and, Lord, but he was tired!

The schedule had been heavy at the office with Burks and Jamison away on vacation. But now his turn had come. He had two blessed weeks of laziness before him. No fool vacation trips, no hiking, fishing or exhausting exercise—just a good old-fashioned loaf. He would sleep as late as he wanted to, swim in the St. George pool or at Jones Beach, drive around Long Island and Westchester. That would be living!

A fog had blown in from the bay since he left Times Square. As he crossed Court Street, the traffic lights showed blurs of red and green against the gathering mist. The cold of it struck through his clothes and seemed to chill him to the marrow. Moisture gathered on the sills and cornices until the cold drops spattered on the sidewalk with a sound like autumn rain.

Joralemon Street was empty, lifeless, blurred with slowly drifting fog. The buildings facing it were formless and obscure as objects in a painting, on which the second color had been brushed while the first was still wet. High above the rooftops and the mist, the moon was not yet quite obscured. A hazy halo trailed around it like a blown scarf. A snatch from Oscar Wilde's "Salome" came to him as he looked up.

> The moon . . . she is like a dead woman;
> A dead woman who covers herself with a veil and goes looking for lovers—

"I beg your pardon!" He broke off the half mumbled quotation. Moon gazing, he had run full-tilt into a woman. Even as he voiced his quick apology, he saw her reel, clutch at the railing of an areaway. She swayed for a moment, and fell.

"I'm so sorry!" He knelt by her, slipping an arm underneath her shoulders. "Are you badly hurt? I wasn't looking where I walked—" But while he spoke contritely, he was arguing with a backwash of thought. "The street was empty as a blown eggshell just now. There's no doorway here, no cross street, no area. . . . Where in hell did she come from?"

A broken moan, half trembling sigh and half stifled groan, came from her. Through the light cloth of her raincoat he could feel her warmth. It was incredible. The sleek silk felt hot to his touch, as if it had lain in the sun, or on a heated radiator. His hand brushed her cheek. It was almost scalding to his fingers. She seemed scorching, parched with fever.

"Good heavens, you're ill!" he cried. "Let me help you!"

"I—I'm just faint," she broke in. Despite his apprehension, he was aware of the throatiness, the deep, mellow quality of her voice. "If you'll only help me home. . . ."

He raised her, and she seemed to gain strength from his touch. For the first few faltering steps she leaned against him heavily. But when they reached the cross street, her shoulder was barely brushing his. When they were halfway down the block, her hand was resting on his arm more in formality than for assistance.

"I'm sorry if I made you feel uneasy," she told him. "You really didn't hurt me, only took me off my balance. I also wasn't looking where I walked, and when we bumped into each other—" Her voice trailed off and she fell silent for a dozen steps. "I'd come out for a breath of air. The cool, sweet fog seemed so good— And the next thing I knew—"

"But you're ill," he insisted. "You're burning." The tightening of her fingers on his arm was like the sudden clamping of a vise. He could hear the breath rasp sharply through her teeth. "You're feverish."

"Ah!" She let the exclamation out slowly, like a sigh of relief. "It's nothing, really. I often run a temperature. That's why the fog felt so good. But I'm quite all right now—see!"

SHE stripped a glove off and laid bared fingers on his cheek. He started with surprise. Three minutes ago she had been feverish enough to burst a thermometer. Now her hand was cool and smooth, faintly moist—as normal as his own. It was soft, too, and beautifully formed, he knew by its feel. He caught from it the vestige of faint scent—mingled musk and sandalwood and wild carnation, provocative as half heard Oriental music.

For a moment he had an impulse to turn his head and press a kiss against the fingers resting softly on his cheek. But he fought down the blind urge.

Three-quarters of the long block was taken up with brownstone fronts, dear to the *haut monde* of New York in the late seventies and early eighties. Now they had been remodeled into small, dark flats, some with "Vacancy" cards in their front windows. At the corner reared a tall apartment building.

Between the older houses and the new apartment, set back from the sidewalk by a grass plot fenced in with an ornamental iron railing, was a little red-brick residence. It was two stories high, with a low, white stoop and long twin windows, through whose drawn curtains a gleam of cozy lamplight glowed against the coldness of the fog.

"I live here," she told him. "Thank you so much for—"

"May I come in—to see that you're all right?" he asked diffidently. To presume upon the service he had done her was unfair, he realized. But she had seemed gravely ill when he crashed into her and— Why beat about the bush? In all his thirty years, he'd never been so attracted to a woman as he was to her.

Her laugh bore out the promise of her voice. Beginning with a low, soft chuckle, it ended in a gay, infectious bell-tone.

"Why not?" she countered as she handed him her key. "I know you're dying for a drink and a cigarette. I could do nicely with them, myself."

The little house was only one room wide. They stepped from a small entrance into a combination living room and parlor.

Bokhara scatter-rugs lay on the polished floor. Old-fashioned chintz, patterned with bouquets of roses, hung at the low windows. Deep chairs and sofas were slip-covered in a warm rose linen that went well with the gray goodwork and walls. A low coffee table of pear wood, waxed to a satin finish, stood before the nearest couch. A baby grand piano with the score of *Der Fliegende Hollander*

open on its music rack was by the windows. Over all, the shaded lamplight cast a glow like mellow, antique gold.

She slipped her shrouding raincoat off and doffed her felt storm hat. Her knitted dress of coral rayon molded her slim figure as revealingly as if it had been cased in plastic cellulose. McCumber felt his heart beat quicker. She had long, violet eyes a long mouth. Her light hair was warmer than ash blond, but still too pale to be called yellow. It was drawn back in smooth soft waves from her forehead. Her small, straight nose and small, pointed chin made his eyes go soft. Every line of her was long, but definitely feminine.

She waved him to a seat and left him. But she returned in an incredibly short time with a tall, sweat-beaded shaker and two glasses. The Martinis were just right, with vermouth cutting the sharp flavor of the gin without destroying its dryness. He had never tasted better cigarettes. The more he looked at her, the lovelier she seemed. The more he listened to the throaty pizzicato of her voice, the more his fascination grew.

He had no idea what they talked about. He knew only that one spoke and the other listened alternately. He was happier in that lamplit room, with the chintz curtains drawn against the outside fog, than he had ever been before.

"I'm Frank McCumber, an accountant by profession. But now, thank goodness, I'm on a two-weeks' vacation."

She smiled acknowledgment of the self-introduction. Then she replied when he waited for an exchange of confidence.

"Real names are so prosaic. You found me in distress and rescued me like a true knight. I'll be Niume to you, and call you Pellinore."

So they were Niume and Pellinore to each other.

When finally he rose to leave, she came to the door with him. His farewell glance took in the lovely contours of her face, the gleam of lamplight on her silken, pale gold hair, the softness of her half closed eyes.

"May I come to see how you are in the morning?" he begged.

"I know I'll be quite well, but please don't let that keep you away," she laughed.

"If you're well— Do you ride?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Then shall we say we have a date for half-past six, if the weather's fine?"

She nodded, smiling. He turned away, begrudging even the few hours of sleep that lay between their first farewell and their next meeting.

MORNING came, sweet and cool, with limpid, fog-washed air and bright June sunshine sparkling on wet trees and grass. The little brick house looked even more inviting in daylight. Its white woodwork had been freshly painted. Geraniums blossomed in green window boxes. Its three-stepped stoop was scrubbed to almost dazzling brightness.

She was waiting, dressed for riding in white Bedford cord breeches, and a shirt of soft white silk open at the throat. About her almost incredibly slim waist, a scarf of pistachio green was wound and rewound like a cummerbund. A length of silk of the same shade was twisted turban-wise about her bright, fair hair. Black, high boots cased her narrow, high-arched feet and slender legs.

All morning they rode through the park while a light breeze played among the white birch trees. The fresh turned earth of flower beds beside the bridle paths smelled rich and warm.

By the time they stopped for hamburgers and beer at the zoo lunchroom, he knew he was in love with her—deeply, tremulously; wonderingly.

The tempo of their relationship quickened with each sun-bright summer day. Women had never meant much to him. One does not get a C.P.A. certificate at twenty-six without hard study, and he had never had the time or inclination for romance.

But this girl— She was like someone he might have read about, or dreamed of when he made up stories to himself. She seemed too wonderful and beautifully perfect for anyone like him to meet and know. He treasured every moment of her company, drawing each one out as long as he could, counting it as misers count their gold.

Every waking moment he was with her. She had a sort of eagerness, a questing, ardent love of life and a vitality that was almost startling. Besides, she fairly reveled in the things they did together. She might have been some schoolgirl brought up in a convent and just given freedom, judging by the way she plunged into activity.

They visited the shore. Lovely as a Greek statue in yellow halter-neck swim suit, long limbed and graceful as a second Atalanta, she ran along the gleaming beach. With the sunlight frothing in her hair, she plunged through the breakers to swim out into the deep blue water with fearless, beautiful vitality. Emerging presently, dripping and lovely as a naiad from the foam, she was ready to lead him to some fresh activity.

Yet there was a mysterious timidity, or fearfulness about her which clashed oddly with her physical daring. She would be laughing, fairly bubbling with the joy of living. Suddenly her mood would change. The laugh-lights would vanish from her eyes. Her pupils would swell and spread until they seemed almost to hide the irises, like those of a frightened cat. Sometimes, in the midst of a laugh, she would halt abruptly and look round her with an apprehensive glance. Then he'd see the tremor of horripilation ripple through her glowing skin as if a chilling wind blew over her.

Once, as they sat at luncheon in a midtown restaurant, a man at the next table raised his voice angrily.

"I'll be damned if I do!" he shouted.

At the mild oath, her face went as white as parchment. The breath hissed softly through her teeth. Her lower lip began to quiver. Her eyes darkened, and he saw fear staring from them—fear that came from heart and soul. It looked out from her eyes as from the windows of a torture chamber.

"Please, Pellinore," she begged. "Take me out—out into the sunshine."

Five minutes later she was chatting gayly as if she had never known a thought of fear. They strolled down Fifth Avenue, admiring the displays in the shop windows.

TWO weeks passed, fourteen drifting days when time hung suspended. To him it had been like a view of fairyland with Niume as its Titania. . . . Niume in backless, strapless evening gown, dancing with him on the roofs or at the supper clubs. Niume in smart crepe print with doeskin gloves and a hat that would have made any other woman look ridiculous, smiling at him across luncheon tables. Niume on the tennis court in shorts and halter, the sunlight like a halo on her misty golden hair. Niume in a swim suit of molded lastex. Her teeth were as white as ocean foam, her red lips startling against the green spume of water as she swam beside him with long, easy strokes. . . .

They were driving back from Asbury. A light rain had come up as they neared Jersey City, a soft summer rain darkening the pavements and bringing surcease from the sultry summer heat. Drifting in between the curtains of the car, it fell delicately against their cheeks. It seemed to him that the drops fell gayly past the butter-yellow of the street lamps'

glow. He sensed that the entire universe shared his elation. For in her eyes that afternoon he'd surely read the answer to the question he hadn't been able to make his lips ask.

"Niume." He took his hand off of the steering wheel and laid it on hers when a red light signaled a stop. "Tonight ends it."

"Yes, Pellinore, it ends tonight."

She had answered so softly that he hardly heard. Yet something in the quality of her tone drew his eyes to her face.

In the faint reflection of the dashboard light, her features were expressionless as a dead woman's. Her eyes were set, fixed, fearful, as though they looked at something just beyond her vision, something nameless, dreadful, horrible.

"You're not well?" he asked in quick apprehension. Through the soft suede of her glove he felt the mounting fever, as he'd felt it through her raincoat on the night he met her in the fog.

"Not very. . . . Please, dear, take me back quickly. I can't stand it—"

Her voice was flat, expressionless, almost mechanical. When he looked at her again, he felt a shiver light as air go through him. It was as if he sat beside the suffering ghost of a girl in the flesh. He shoved the automatic gear-shift forward when the red light changed to green. They drove the rest of the way in silence.

"May I call tomorrow, on my way to office?" he pleaded as they stopped at her door. "I'd like to ask—"

"Don't—don't say it, Pellinore," she begged him in a breaking voice. "I couldn't bear it, now."

He swung the car around and looked back. She was standing on the threshold with her head thrown back. Her hands were clasped upon her breast and her body leaned toward him in agonized and blind embrace. Her lips were parted lightly and her eyes tight closed. Then she turned slowly, shoulders drooping. The darkness of the doorway swallowed her.

HE WENT home, but not to bed. For hours he paced his living room, walking a frustrated diamond-shaped figure on the rug. Finally the sky turned tawny gray, steel, then pale blue. A rose glow quickened in the east, like blood that comes back in the face of one reviving from a faint.

By the time he reached her corner, he was almost running. If she were ill, she needed him. Sick or well, he needed her—needed her with passionate longing.

"Niume! Niume!" His hurrying footsteps beat the rhythm of her name against the sidewalk. The last old brownstone house was passed. He was at her gate.

Hand on the iron, he came to a halt. His heart gave a cold, nauseating lurch. The world seemed spinning crazily on a loose axis. Time stopped, and breathing with it. He licked his dry lips with a tongue that had suddenly gone arid. He clutched the rusty iron gate as if he clung to the cornice of a high building.

This was not the little freshly painted house with spotless white woodwork and red geraniums abloom in long, green window boxes! This place reeked with decay. The window casings sagged awry. The paint was blistered on them, peeling off like sunburned skin. The steps of the stoop had warped until they could hold small puddles of rain in their troughs. The little yard was bare of grass and littered with old bottles, bits of soiled newspaper and the rusting wreck of a discarded bedspring. Window panes were cracked and broken. In one of them leaned a "For Rent" sign, tattered and stained with age and dust.

Plainly, the house had not been occupied in years.

Next door, a colored boy laid out the rubber vestibule mats of the apart-

ment house, before hosing them on the sidewalk. McCumber half walked, half lurched toward him.

"The young lady who lived here"—he waved a shaking hand at the ruinous little house—"when did she move—"

The Negro eyed him askance.

"Young lady, suh?" he countered. "Ain't no young lady lived there. Ain't no one lived there since ah come to work here, an' that's five years ago. No, suh. That place always been fo' rent."

McCumber turned away. He was finding it hard to breathe. There was a curious, stifled feeling in his breast. The blood churned in his ears.

How could he trace her. How was he to find her? Inside him rose a silent, hopeless cry.

"I don't even know her name!"

The drugstore near his house was just opening as he went past.

"Some aromatic ammonia, please," he told the young man at the soda counter. He drained the stimulant at a gulp.

"Want your films, now, Mr. McCumber?" asked the drug clerk. "They come in late last night."

He thrust the envelope into his pocket and hurried to his apartment. He couldn't go to the office today. He couldn't bear to face them. . . .

Had he dreamed it all? Had he imagined it? Quick fear traced icy fingers down his spine. Was he going mad?

The pictures! They'd reassure him. He had taken several of her. She had taken one or two of him. They had asked a passing stranger at the beach to photograph them together.

As if it held reprief from the gallows, he tore the envelope open, spilled its contents on the desk. Six bewildering pictures showed nothing but views of sea and sand and sky. He recognized them after awhile.

Niume had posed against those backgrounds, but there was no human being in the scenes! His own face smiled at him from several bright, glossy prints.

Here was the one the stranger had taken of them. How silly he looked, standing there against the background of the curling waves. With an inane smirk upon his face, he held his left arm horizontal from his body, as if it clasped invisible shoulders. . . .

MAD! Over and over, the drums of his mind beat the dreadful word, pounded it into a terrifying rhythm. Mad. Mad. Mad-mad-mad! In every corner of the chamber, shadows seemed to hunch and rear and pant, waiting to pounce on him—drag him down into the plumbless abyss of insanity.

To and fro across the rug he paced, like a caged beast counting its bars. Ten steps this way, ten steps back, then turn and pace ten more. His throat was tight. His lips were dry. There was a burning, scratching feeling, as of hot sand, on his eyelids.

Knuckles pounded on his door.

"McCumber?" the expressman asked. "Sign here, please. Parcel of books from Cincinnati."

Mechanically he hunted for the hammer. Opening the box would occupy his hands. Anything was better than that everlasting pacing back and forth. The books were wrapped in newspaper, several layers of it. As he peeled off the padding, a two-week-old headline caught his eye.

BLOND HAMMER SLAYER
WALKS LAST MILE

Central City, June 14—Olga Wheatley, the girl who "never had a date" until the night she was picked up by a small-time traveling salesman and came home to a beating and to kill her stepfather for administering it, paid the final penalty tonight at 11:49.

Disdaining prison matrons' arms or spiritual help from prison chaplains, she walked unaided to the death chamber. She maintained that iron silence which had marked her ever since the jury found her guilty of the hammer slaying of Fred Hatton.

(Concluded on page 93)

MISTY ISLAND

By ALEXANDER SAMALMAN

Author of "The Lost Hour," "The Changer of History," etc.

MY EXPERIMENTS were nearing completion. I was in rather an exalted state, and the currents of history swept over me gently, so that I was willing to embark on a sea journey in the face of the countless dangers. However, my travel agent assured me that the route my steamer would take was well out of the area of conflict.

I must explain that I had been working on the electron of hydrogen in an attempt to create a new fund of energy for the use of the human race. Perhaps I was egotistical, but I felt that my discoveries would come to mean more than the frantic and senseless struggle over territorial adjustments that engaged universal attention. It seemed to me that war would ultimately be outlawed as a result of the pioneer work of scientists like myself whose discoveries would make the possession of vast natural resources hardly a matter of importance.

My mind was so completely given to the thought of future eras that I am afraid I took the present too lightly, based upon it too few of my calculations. And so when I needed certain precision instruments that were hard to obtain in this country, I ventured to go in quest of them.

Once upon the steamer, I admit I became rather apprehensive. I noted the strain under which the crew and all the passengers were suffering, and marked that every traveler on this vessel journeyed for some definite purpose that could not be denied. When I explained my own mission, I was rewarded by incredulous grins. Perhaps they thought I was a spy. Or a fool. . . .

There in the gloom I saw the outline of an island

The day on which we were torpedoed comes back to me in a hazy dream. I had been walking on the

A Victim of Disaster Finds a Mysterious Haven

deck, I remember, when there was a sudden concussion simultaneous with a shrill warning signal. Then the steamer rocked gently, and listed to one side, and after that I seemed to hear a thousand voices all at once, shot through by the piercing screams of women. There was frantic tugging at life-boat ropes, and passengers were scurrying about, trying to save their possessions, adjusting their safety belts.

The confusion aboard was matched by an angry sea that bellowed thirstily, beating against the sides of the steamer as though it, too, joined in the onslaught upon us.

When Fred Williams, the first mate passed me, his face was white, and I heard him mutter: "Damn fool."

He had felt from the first day that I had no business being on the ship.

That is all the recollection I have of our being torpedoed. If I tell it calmly, it is because I was perfectly calm. I understand the incident cost dozens of lives and further complicated the international situation. But as for me, it did not affect me terribly. I was not frightened; only curious, with the detachment of the scientist.

After the initial shock, everything grew hazy. It was as if I were going under an anaesthetic; the experience was blunted. I tried to keep my senses in order to see and hear what was going on, but could not.

MY next memory is of swimming —or rather floating—through water that was now inexplicably serene and quiet and as I floated I watched the dancing wavelets with a distinct emotion of pleasure.

Then the bright sunshine turned to semi-darkness, and a mist hung over the sea. And there in the gloom I saw the outline of an island, an island encircled by fog that formed a halo about it. Without volition I was drifting toward the island, and soon I was ashore.

I made my way up a narrow road and came to a large house constructed of some unfamiliar material. The door, possibly outfitted with a photo-electric cell of some sort, opened as I approached.

I walked through the halls of the building as though walking on air, and came to a large, high-ceiled room where I saw a short, stocky man working with test tubes. A scientist. I felt at home.

I strode up to him, but he did not look at me. I watched him as he mixed chemicals and gave forth sighs of satisfaction and grunts of disappointment while noting the reactions.

Suddenly, as if just aware of my presence, he spoke up:

"Please do not bother me. I am concluding the most vital experiment in the history of the—"

Before I could hear the rest of what he had to say, I was away from him, literally drifting into another part of this strange place. And now I entered another room, where there stood a tall, well groomed man in a flawless tuxedo, singing in a rich baritone voice. But what a voice!

Never had I heard its equal. It pounded like the beating of the sea, the fury of a storm. It caressed like the voice of a mother to a new-born babe. Elemental, it was alive with the concentrated fire of the centuries. I stood entranced, and again a strange compulsion drew me away from the sweet singer into another part of the building.

There before me was an old, old man, with a flowing beard and white hair, and eyes in which were mirrored the hopes and fears and above all the tenderness of man's eternal soul. And there he sat, an old-fashioned quill pen in his hands, writing, writing. And I watched the varying expressions on his face, saw him go through all the pangs of creation. And like the scientist, he became aware of me after I had long observed him, and he looked up at me, saying not a

word, but I could see that he implored me to leave him.

I PASSED on. Through halls of lore and learning, through machine shops and factories, through lonely laboratories and busy marts. The entire cycle of man's activities was revolving about me, and everywhere were men and women intent, industrious, with pride of accomplishment glowing in their eyes. Doctors, actresses, teachers, philosophers—all gathered together mysteriously in this house of wonder.

And then suddenly someone stood beside me, plucked me by the sleeve, and spoke gently:

"Come. Come with me."

And I followed a white-garbed man to a bright and lordly chamber where he sat down near me at an ornate desk and put an index card before him.

"Your name, please?"

"Roger Farlon," I said. He began printing out the letters. Then followed a succession of the usual questions, for all the world as if I were registering for a college course. My curiosity, not very active up to this moment—I don't know why—was growing.

"What place is this? Where is it?"

"Can't you tell?" he said, smiling.

And suddenly I found that I knew. I looked up at him, and his face was luminous. I bowed my head in humility.

"And these people I met?"

"Oh, yes. The scientist is the discoverer of the cure for cancer. A great man. We have other very interesting souls, too. The old man you met is greater than Balzac. The finest novelist America would have known. He fell at Appomattox."

"And the scientist—the discoverer of the cancer cure—"

"He has not been here that long. A victim of the first World War, to be exact. He was working for the French government and his laboratory was bombed. A pity. A great pity."

His eyes were deep with compassion.

"Yes, they are all here—the savants and seers, the lords of language, the masters of song whom the world sent out to be slaughtered. Here they continue their God-given tasks, but alas, man knows it not. And generation after generation, the world deprives itself of its greatest men and women.

"The world talks of progress. What does it know of progress? It has advanced, yes—advanced in spite of war and stupidity and prejudice—but how much the greater would be its accomplishment if it did not pluck the fairest flowers of its garden!"

HE SHOOK his head sadly.

"The fools," he said. "The poor fools!"

And there was the barest hint of anger in his voice as he continued:

"Think of what the earth could be if it did not send its greatest and best into inferno! It could have advanced a thousand years in the last century. . . .

"But I forget. You, too, are of the chosen ones. You, too, belong in this haven set aside for the creative souls whose work is cut short by war. You shall do great things, great things, and you must begin. . . . I had better take you to your work place."

As I followed my saintly guide, I heard the sweet song of the singer, and the impassioned utterances of a great actress; and I heard the pounding of hammers in the shops, and the subtle noises of the scientific laboratory. I thought of the remedies and the songs, the achievements and the knowledge lost to men. And the stranger led me on, muttering to himself:

"We expect so many. I am afraid we shall have to create a new wing. . . ."

Next Issue: THE SHADOW OF NIRVANA, *by* EARL PIERCE, JR.

The Third Life of Nine

By GEORGE J. RAWLINS

Author of "The Thirteenth Boat," "The Light Must Burn," etc.

"Your brother lives!" the Hindu said

"Devil Cat" They Called the Strange Beast that Came from Nowhere—Bent on a Mission that None Could Understand!

"BUT I can't believe my brother is dead!" Jack Evans completed his story to a turbaned Hindu in a small dark room of a narrow street in the native quarter of Zamboanga.

"Come! We shall see!"

Pesos clinked. The swarthy black-

eyed mystic, reputed to be versed in demonology, lighted his incense, mumbled a ritual and gazed into his crystal.

The young American sat watching the Oriental, skepticism plainly written on his sun-bronzed face. He had come to this soothsayer with small faith in his magic. Merely a last chance, since all normal inquiries concerning his brother's whereabouts had failed.

"Your brother lives!" said the Hindu, his hypnotic gaze focused deep in the crystal ball. "I see him plainly! He and Moodo, and—a third! I see sand. Low bushes. Much water. . . . The picture fades."

The Hindu straightened up, rubbing his eyes as if he had just come out of the bright sun.

"Where is he? Where?" Despite Yankee incredulity, Evans hung breathless on the answer.

"So much as I have told you is revealed." The Hindu shook his turbanned head. "The rest is hidden. Seek and ye shall find!"

So Jack Evans sought. . . .

On the map, the Sulu Sea may look like a land-locked harbor. But its opalescent reaches, four hundred by eight hundred miles, are ample space in which a man may be lost.

After the last typhoon had roared up out of the Celebes, "Buck" Evans, Jack's brother, had failed to reappear with his small trading schooner. In the ports among the islands, fishermen and traders shook their heads in response to Jack's questions. They all knew Buck. His fondness for pets made him conspicuous. But none had seen him, his schooner nor his Moro "boy," Moodo, since the storm.

One hope remained. There were many isolated islands, eschewed by the natives, in that she-devil of a Sulu Sea. Some were without fresh water, some ringed with dangerous reefs—and some tabu, still bearing the curse of some ancient Malay god whose very name was lost in antiquity.

On some such island, Jack Evans reasoned, Buck might be marooned. Buck and Moodo. Moodo, that sea-hardened Moro of uncertain age, who also laid claim to a knowledge of the Black Arts. But who was the "third" that the Hindu had seen in the crystal?

WITH only his Filipino boy, Marayog, Jack Evans had worked down from the Culyo Islands to Roca Negra. Still no trace of Buck. Then came the long haul to San Miguel, and they lay becalmed for several days.

On this leg of the trip the strange stowaway first appeared! Seven days without sight of land or sail, of complete isolation from the rest of the world. Seven days aboard a small sloop in which no sizable living thing could hide. And yet, one morning, there it was, calmly sitting on the forward deck and seemingly as much at home aboard the craft as either Jack or Marayog.

The preceding night had been dead calm. Both Jack and Marayog had slept, for no ghost of a breeze stirred the loose hanging sails. Between midnight and morning Jack had awakened with a start. He dreamed—or fancied he had dreamed—that a warm furry thing had softly brushed against his bare arm and shoulder.

Sitting upright, he had wiped the sleep from his eyes, glanced about him. Vaguely he had caught the pungent smell of wood smoke.

There on the aft deck beside him Marayog still slept, sprawled on his stomach. The dugout—a native *banca*—hung athwart the stern, securely lashed to its stanchions. Only the low, eerie squeak of a pulley-block swinging idly at the masthead disturbed the deathlike stillness.

Jack Evans got up, looked about the ship. All seemed in order. Maybe he hadn't smelled smoke, after all. But what had awakened him so suddenly?

The moon had long since set. False

dawn had not yet cast its glow along the horizon. Pale, deceptive starlight illumined the enchanted sea. And then, a formless black thing seemed to float from the low trunk-cabin down upon the bow deck. With a muttered "Damn!" Evans sprang forward—to find the bow deck empty!

"Must be going loco, "he mumbled. "Been in the tropics too long!"

At last he located the weird apparition, or thought he did! A planet blazed brightly near the zenith, brilliant enough to cast a shadow of the pulley-block swinging at the masthead. He watched the slowly drifting shadow and concluded this must be the thing he had seen.

He returned to his mat on the aft deck, and slept fitfully until morning. . . .

Hushed, awed monotones awoke him.

"Sir! Sir!"

Evans opened his eyes, blinked at a misty dawn.

"Sir! Sir!"

He looked up to see Marayog's brown flat face bending over him, wide-set eyes round with fright.

"Huh? What is it, Marayog?"

"I don-no, sir. I think some devil! He come in the night! He on fore deck."

Jack Evans ran his fingers through tawny hair.

"What's eating you, Marayog?" He grinned sleepily at the scared native. "What kind of a devil?"

Then he remembered his experience of the night. An unwonted chill ran through him and he got to his feet with alacrity.

"There! On cabin, sir. Look!"

EVANS stared in unbelieving amazement. On the roof of the cabin beside the mast, industriously washing its face, sat a huge black tom-cat!

"Well. I'll be an alligator's grandma!"

Evans went forward eyeing the cat incredulously. Marayog remained discreetly on the aft deck.

"Hello, cat! Where in blazes did you come from?"

The cat looked up. His eyes, one green and the other copper, met Jack's squarely. Then he resumed the careful preparation of his morning toilet.

"Well, if I'm not a daffodil!" Jack exclaimed. "That beats me!" He turned to Marayog, who had inched a few cautious steps closer. "Must have been stowed away ever since we left Roca Negra."

"No, sir!" protested Marayog, excitedly. "He no stowaway. He just come! We been gone Roca Negra seven-eight days. I bail out bilge, I sweep cabin, I clean lockers—and no cat! No, sir, he not on board before!"

Evans reached down and tentatively stroked the black fur. Again he thought he detected the faint smell of smoke—too faint to be sure of it. The cat arched his back and lifted his long tail in appreciation of the touch.

"He's a nice cat," Evans said. "I guess some family on Roca Negra is minus their pet."

"He no come from there!" insisted Marayog. "He no like Philippine cats on Roca Negra. He American cat—and I think he devil, maybe!"

Marayog was partially right. The scrawny domestic cats of the Philippine Archipelago have short screw-tails, much like the tails of Boston bull terriers. Long-tailed cats are seldom found outside American or European colonies.

Since Marayog would have nothing to do with the animal, Evans fed it while the Filipino boy prepared breakfast. The cat ate, but did not seem particularly hungry. Certainly he had not undergone any protracted fast. How had he lived for those seven days at sea? Evans was more mystified than ever.

Soon after sun-up a fair breeze came out of the north. The calm was broken and the little boat raced on its course toward San Miguel. Marayog went

about his duties mumbling to himself. To Evans' amusement, the native kept one eye on the cat and gave it a wide berth.

At noon they raised land dead ahead. The boat sped along with her lee rail awash. With this wind behind them they could make port well before dark.

During the afternoon Marayog approached Evans at the wheel.

"Sir, you go-na leave him at San Miguel?"

"The cat? Why no. He's brought us luck! Look at this wind. First we've had in over a week. He's our *anting-anting!*"

"He no *anting-anting,* sir! He no good luck. He devil cat! Pleece, sir, I think I no like to sail with devil cat!"

"Aw, nerts, Marayog! He's just a cat. And anyhow, I've decided not to stop at San Miguel. There's a native village there, and if they'd heard anything of Buck or Moodo I'd have got the news long ago. We're going straight through to the Cagayan Sulu group while this wind holds."

Marayog considered. "Maybe many nice pearls at San Miguel!" wheedled the Filipino.

"I'm not looking for pearls now. I'm looking for my brother."

JACK EVANS sailed past San Miguel a mile to windward. As they raced by the island he noticed the cat walking sedately aft along the sloping deck. He did not hear the subdued splash behind him, half drowned in the gurgle of the wake. The cat suddenly stopped, stared intently at something well astern. Evans turned to follow the cat's gaze.

"Well, I'll be—"

He paused, at a loss for words. There in the sea was Marayog, swimming purposefully toward shore.

Evans spun the helm, to come about. On second thought righted the ship on its course.

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(Continued from page 85)

"T'hell with him, Kits!" he addressed the cat. "If he wants to desert, let him! He's more afraid of you than he is of sharks and barracuda. We can handle this boat, can't we, Tom-cat?"

The cat arched his back and rubbed against the man's legs. He reached down and scratched the animal behind the ear.

As San Miguel dropped behind them, Jack Evans consulted the chart, determined his compass course to the Cagayan Sulus. He set the ship, lashed the helm, and began to prepare supper. This was where he missed Marayog! The cat showed interest in the culinary operations and Evans fed him again.

Stroking the cat's sleek back in the fading twilight, he was surprised at the crackle of electricity that followed his touch. Back in the States he had often noticed this phenomenon, but only in winter. Never before had he seen a cat whose fur gave off electricity in hot weather!

"You're some cat!" he remarked. "Now beat it, while I feed myself."

Accomplishing that purpose to his satisfaction, he made things shipshape for the night. He expected the wind to drop at sunset, but it held steady. He decided he could catch a few winks of sleep while the ship ploughed its way through the darkness under lashed helm.

Going to the chart bridge, he found the cat sitting on the bridge near the compass, looking out apparently at something off the port bow. Its gaze was so intent that Evans tried to follow it, but could see nothing.

"What are you looking at, Kits?"

Again the soft fur crackled with static electricity under the man's hand. But the cat did not respond to the caress. He continued to sit rigid, his round, unmatched eyes fixed on unseen things.

"Look here, fellow!" Evans suppressed a shiver. "Don't make me think Marayog was right about you. If you get me to seeing ghosts you'll be swimming ashore yourself!"

He glanced at the compass and found the ship several points off her course, bearing too far to starboard. He eased off the helm until the needle reached its correct reading. He did not notice that as the ship swung, the cat's gaze slowly shifted until it rested dead ahead in the new direction the ship was taking.

After dark, Jack Evans stretched himself on his mat for a bit of sleep. The cat came purring, rubbing against him, apparently pleased with the whole wide world.

"Say, cat," said Evans, "where in the devil *did* you come from, anyway? Can't blame Marayog for thinking you materialized into one of your nine lives!" He chuckled. "How does it feel to be reincarnated, Kits?"

HIS chuckle died hollowly as the cat's eyes burned into his. Their round pupils seemed enormous under the misty light of a high-riding moon. They seemed to hold some vast knowledge beyond his understanding—perhaps beyond human understanding. Something in their lambent glow reminded the man of the turbaned Hindu who had told him Buck still lived.

Evans wondered about that Hindu. Not overly susperstitious, he normally considered these Oriental mystics as charlatans. The Hindu, he reasoned, had a fifty-fifty chance of being right whether he said Buck was dead or alive.

"He knew what I wanted to hear," Jack Evans said to himself, "so that's what he told me." Yet this logic was not convincing!

Evans dozed off, the cat's eyes still upon him. And he dreamed about cat's eyes—how they glowed in the dark, how they are sensitive to ultraviolet light and can see things humans cannot see. And about cats worshiped by ancient Egyptians—cats associated with broom-riding witches, and cats

with that uncanny homing instinct, a faculty not attributable to any known physical sense recognized by science.

And all the while the little ship ploughed its way across the moonlit sea while Jack Evans slept—and the strange cat stood solitary watch.

Evans awoke with a start. He had not intended to sleep so long. Traveling under lashed helm and a stiff breeze, his course should be checked more often. His chart showed deep water and no land for many miles, but he knew he could not depend too heavily on charts in these remote seas.

The gibbous moon hung low upon the horizon of a finger's breadth above the ship's windward rail. In silhouette against its yellow disk sat the cat, apparently intent on the course ahead.

Evans got to his feet and started for the chart bridge. The cat bounded ahead of him and leaped to the bridge beside the compass. In the murky glow of a ship's lantern which served as binnacle light, the needle swung erratically.

Jack Evans stared at the wavering pointer, perplexed. The compass rode level in its gimbals without perceptible movement, yet the magnetized bar had evidently received a sudden impulse. He watched it slowly come to rest, registering exactly the same course on which he had set the ship at twilight.

But why had the needle been swinging when he first looked at it? The cat had jumped on the bridge, but had not touched the compass. Of that he was sure.

Without thinking, his hand went out to stroke the cat. Again the crackle of static electricity as he touched the silken fur—and the compass needle jumped wildly!

"Oh-oh! Look here, cat, what kind of monkey business is this?"

He picked up the animal, carried him to the stern and dropped him in the empty fish box, closing the heavy lid. Returning to the compass he watched it come to rest again. This

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time, it read nearly twenty degrees off the plotted course!

"Damn that cat!" he muttered. "Who would think his fur had enough electricity to swing a compass needle!"

THEN he remembered. The cat had been sitting in the same place and must have caused the same error last night! For ten hours they had been on the wrong course! He replotted his last traverse to correct his position, figured the new bearing on Cagayan Sulu and adjusted the helm.

And all the while the cat howled dismally from the fish box.

When Evans released the cat, it looked around the horizon, then ran meowing along the rail to the bow. Its tail lashing, it gazed for awhile straight ahead as if looking for something. It slowly turned and stared out to sea—about twenty degrees off the port bow.

"Yeah?" said Evans. "That's where you were taking us by fooling with the compass! Yo're a helluva navigator, Kits! There's five hundred miles of open sea in that direction!"

He had spoken rather loudly. Like a small boy whistling when he passed a graveyard, he needed the sound of his own voice to reassure him.

His attention was diverted from the cat. The sail that had bellied stiffly in the wind for many hours deflated slowly like a leaky toy balloon. The wind was slacking—dying rapidly....

By sunrise they lay becalmed.

The calm persisted that day and night, and into the next day. The sails hung idly, flapped lazily like buzzards' wings to the slowly rolling ground swells. Jack Evans mentally cursed the sea for the treacherous thing she is, a Lorelei who whispers of delirious delights, but a siren who in the turn of a moment might change to shrieking frenzy, rend and tear like a feline she-thing of hell.

He shaded his eyes against the heat and glare, searched again for his solitary companion. Sitting on the trunk-cabin, the cat still gazed off into distance over the port bow. Since the wind had died the cat had sat there like a sphinx looking out at nothing—always over the port bow!

Utterly bored with inaction, Evans walked up the deck and stood beside the animal.

"Cat," he said, "you're beginning to get my goat, staring off into space like that! I believe you're a jinx! Remember, it's mighty easy to lose a cat overboard out here in open ocean!"

But he wondered if it really were so easy. The cat had appeared from nowhere. He might do it again! Throwing him overboard might not be so effective.

Jack Evans snorted. It angered him that he was capable of entertaining such ideas.

"Like any superstitious native!" he mumbled, but the thought persisted, and he found himself furtively eyeing the cat as Marayog had done.

The false compass reading caused by the cat had carried them many miles off their true course. When Jack Evans had started to correct the error the wind had dropped, for thirty hours they lay becalmed without apparent motion.

The chart showed no current, but by dragging the lead line Evans detected a two-knot flow. It also carried them eastward still farther off his course—still farther in the direction in which the cat kept staring. Evans could not arrest the drift, as the bottom was beyond reach of his anchor line.

He figured they were moving through a desolate sea area void of islands, well off the steamer lanes, and far removed from usual routes plied by native craft. A vast and dreary desert in the midst of the Sulu Sea.

SUDDENLY the cat became restless. He came crying to Evans, ran around his feet and mewed up at him as if begging. He looked down at

the animal, frankly perplexed. It sprang upon the port rail, teetered there, peering eagerly off to port.

Evans gazed in the same direction. Saw nothing. He had done that many times before with the same result. It gave him a creepy feeling! What was it that so intrigued the cat? What did the cat see that was totally invisible to his own keen eyes?

He procured his marine glasses, carefully searched the horizon and the intervening expanse of water. Still nothing! Not even a bird in all that waste of sea and sky. But the cat still stared!

And Jack Evans stared at the cat. Did the animal see formless things from some other world? Was the cat crazy? Or was he?

He swung the strap to his glasses over his shoulder, clambered up the shroud lines. Again he searched the sea with his glasses. And there, off to port, a dark low hump on the horizon! An island!

Excitedly he slid down the shrouds. The speck of land was quite invisible from the deck's lower elevation—where the cat still watched.

He consulted the chart. No, nothing was shown there! Only deep water over all that vast area. He had sighted an uncharted island! An island apparently little known even to the natives—or perhaps so accursed that even mention of it was tabu.

Here indeed was something to investigate. On just such a place Buck might be marooned! Nervously, he penciled in the island's approximate position on the chart and took its bearing. He spun the helm hard over, but the becalmed ship had no steerageway.

But even while he cursed the lack of wind, the sails began to sway, and darkening ripples feathered the sea's glassy surface. The ship began to move before a rapidly freshening breeze, slowly swung in a wide arc and headed away toward that tiny

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point of land below the horizon.

The cat came back to the aft deck, purring contentedly, curling up in the dugout and went to sleep.

It was a low-lying, desolate island that Jack Evans studied through his glasses as they approached. Much of it utterly bare of vegetation, one end showed a stunted stand of gnarled mangroves fringed with coarse grasses. On all sides greenish-white water betrayed row after row of dangerous coral reefs.

Evans proceeded cautiously under reefed canvas. This was an ideal place to rip the bottom out of a boat. As he threaded his way through the first sunken barriers, a column of smoke suddenly arose from among the mangroves. Someone was on the island and evidently signaling him!

His heart beat faster—perhaps he had reached his goal! He entered a stretch of deep water between the reefs, took time to snatch up his glasses. Yes, there were two ragged figures on the beach, waving frantically! He could not identify them at that distance, but his hopes soared.

And then a harrowing thought assailed him. The Hindu mystic had said, "Buck, Moodo—and a third!" Here were but two! Was Buck the missing one?

UNABLE to proceed farther, Jack ran down his remaining canvas while the restless, loudly purring cat persistently got under foot. As the boat swung to the tug of the anchor, he unlashed the *banca* at the stern, and launched it. Seizing a paddle, he sprang into the canoe—followed immediately by the cat.

"Nothing doing, cat! You stay aboard."

He tossed the animal back on deck and shoved off, paddled away shoreward while the loudly protesting feline watched angrily from the aft deck. . . .

Their first greetings over, Jack began to question Buck and Moodo.

"We've been here ever since the typhoon," said Buck, "and your sail is the first we've seen. This island is the damndest place you ever set foot on. Not even a coconut, and no wood or bamboo fit to build a raft. We've been drinking rain water from pot-holes in the coral rock, and I've eaten fish until I get sick at the sight of 'em."

"But tell me about your wreck," said Jack, after assuring them of a substantial meal aboard his boat.

"Well," said Buck, when they were in the *banca* and paddling out to the sloop, "neither of us knew this darned island was here. Thinking we had plenty of deep water, we threw out a sea-anchor when the blow got bad, and were taking it easy all snug below decks.

"We struck the outer reef without warning and my boat went to pieces like a match box. I don't know yet how we swam that two miles across shoal water to the island. I call it plain luck, but Moodo claims his gods had something to do with it! Moodo thinks he's quite a magician."

"I had an idea," said Jack, thinking of the Hindu, "that there were three of you aboard your boat."

Buck looked inquiringly from Jack to Moodo, and shook his head.

"Black Boy!" the Moro said, grinning.

"Oh!" Buck turned back to Jack. "Say, that *was* queer! When the sea calmed after the storm, we waded and swam out to the wreck to see what we could salvage. The bow of the boat showed not more than two feet out of water, and there, high and dry on top of it, perched my old tom-cat, Black Boy! They say cats have nine lives. Well, Black Boy had at least two lives, for no living thing could have survived the storm out there on the reef!"

Listening to Buck's story, Jack felt a strange prickling sensation at the back of his neck. He paddled in si-

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lence toward the sloop, not looking at his brother or Moodo. Had the Hindu really meant a cat when he said, "Buck, Moodo—and a third?"

If so, why was the cat important enough to deserve mention? Black Boy! And on board his own boat a black tom-cat had appeared from nowhere! Could there be a connection? Could there be a thread of truth in Marayog's idea of a devil cat?

Here in broad daylight, in full possession of his faculties, Jack experienced that uncanny chill which comes with contact with the supernatural.

"WHERE is the cat now?" asked Jack, a slight quaver in his voice.

"Why, Moodo—blast him—did away with Black Boy. Some of his magic hocus-pocus to get us rescued. Said the gods needed a messenger! Took Black Boy out, without my knowing it, and sacrificed him on an altar fire!"

Altar fire! Jack swallowed hard. So that accounted for the smell of wood smoke when he first had discovered the cat!

The canoe swung toward the stern of the sloop.

"I always liked that cat!" said Buck with feeling. "Black Boy was my buddy! Black all over, with one green eye and one bronze eye. And"—he added that with a grin—"in his second life, so help me!"

"Maybe you'll see him in his third life!" said Jack, his face pale under its tan.

The canoe bumped the stern of the sloop. A sleek, lithe form plumped down from the ship's deck and landed with a happy *meow* in Buck's lap.

"Black Boy!" gasped the astonished Buck.

Jack looked at Moodo, and his lips formed a one-word question.

"Messenger?"

The native nodded and grinned.

"Cats always come back!" said the Moro.

DOOMED

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The prison has its own grim lexicon. Prisoners call the death house "the dance hall." The strain of waiting for the call to the electric chair affects even the most hardened convict's nerves. It produces involuntary jerkings and twitchings, like St. Vitus dance.

But Olga Wheatley remained calm throughout the long ordeal of waiting. Even when the warden came to tell her yesterday that Gov. Chas. B. Oglesby had refused a commutation of the death sentence, she showed no more emotion than if he had merely called to pass the time of day.

Not until they strapped her in the chair did she break the sullen, brooding silence. Then the cankering resentment that had festered inside her burst forth in a sharp, blazing statement.

"I killed him, and I'm not sorry. I'm glad of it. I'd do it again, I never had a good time in my life—never had a date, never went to a party, never had a party dress. If I could have just two weeks of the kind of life girls in big cities have, I'd be willing to go to hell. I'd call the bargain square."

Then the guards clamped down the death-cap on her shaven blond head. Warden Thompson raised his hand and the executioner applied the current.

Two minutes and six seconds later, Prison Doctor Edward Earnshaw stepped back with his stethoscope.

"I pronounce this woman dead," he declared.

"Picture on Page Four," the cutline read. With an urgency he could not explain McCumber ruffled through the sheets of crumpled paper.

His heart, just a moment ago, had seemed wrung dry of misery. Now it refilled itself from memories. He began to sob, the hard, dry, ugly sobs of a man unused to tears.

Smiling at him from the rumpled sheet of two-weeks-old newspaper were the lovely features of "Niume." Underneath the picture was the caption:

Would trade hell for two weeks' good time. Olga Wheatley, the blond hammer murderess who "never had a date," died in the electric chair last night. She stated that if she could have two weeks of life and love she'd burn in hell for all eternity and "call it square."

THE BLACK ARTS

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walk upon his son's grave, shall instantly be blessed with power and strange magic.

And so it is believed, that somewhere high in the mountains of Tibet, this magic grave gives power to those who accidentally walk across it—and that once such a person receives that power he becomes a master and remains to carry on the great work of the white father.

Lamas, wind-gods, witch-doctors of Tibet—real masters of the Black Arts for ages past and ages to come—who knows?

—LUCIFER.

LETTERS FROM READERS

THE mailbag continues to grow bulkier, and we're sorry that we can't make more of a dent in it by publishing a whole stackful of letters at one clip. As it is, though, we just pick the most typical of the lot and that gives us all a pretty good cross-section of the reactions of readers. The contributions we've been getting from readers applying for MASTERS' cards in the Black Arts Club are extremely interesting, and we're going to try to print as many as we can.

Meanwhile, those of you who haven't written ought to get out your typewriters or pens and drop us a note. What do *you* think of our magazine? What experience have you to contribute to the world of Black Arts? We're waiting to hear from you—your criticisms and suggestions are helping to make this magazine improve with every issue!

Here goes now for the mailbag. First, up pops a letter from an enthusiastic fan:

It was in 1937 that I first started reading one of your "rival" publications, and found the kind of fiction I wanted most to read. I experimented with other magazines and found, in the latter part of 1938, that a new magazine had been placed on the market. STRANGE STORIES became another addition to my periodical diet of fantasy-fiction. Since then I have never missed an issue of STRANGE STORIES.

Then, at the beginning of the present summer, something happened which brought STRANGE STORIES nearer the reach of its many and increasing readers. It remained a bi-monthly publication but reduced its price to ten cents.

But what was more important, the quality of the magazine, STRANGE STORIES, along with the cover paintings, stories, inside illustrations and accompanying articles, improved to such an extent that it easily overshadowed *all* of its rivals and became the foremost magazine of its kind on the market.

This is, I am glad to say, not only *my* opinion, but also the like opinion of many of my friends (they and myself being members of the Erie Science Fiction League, a local branch of the original THRILLING WONDER STORIES Science Fiction League).

And now for a little added praise, on the latest issue: Seabury Quinn's THE LESSER BRETHREN MOURN, was excellent and will be long remembered. Lucifer's department was far above its usual best, and certainly wish that you (ye Ed.) would personally congratulate th' ole boy for me! As yet I have not had the time to read any more than one other story—and would like to make a little kick. *Grrrrrr!* I'm mad at Oscar Friend, 'cause his JESSAMIN'S DEATH isn't anywhere near his usual good work. So that's all. . . .

Erie, Pa. Laurence J. Buman.

Here's an opinion of the magazine by an artist who draws inspiration from our stories:

I am hereby applying for membership in the Black Arts Club. I certainly am a regular reader of STRANGE STORIES, interested in the occult and am enrolling as a Votary member.

Your magazine has the factor that so many of the mysteries lack—honest-to-goodness punch! Somehow I, and no doubt all of your readers, live right along with the story. They have a tang of reality and still are so exciting and satisfying that we can't wait until the next issue.

I'm an artist, and it's a fact that I turn out my best work when all geared up—and say, I'm original as the dickens after reading through those stories of yours (*ours*).

Grand Rapids, Mich. Gordon F. Kirby.

A well-known practicing psychologist and psycho-analyst writes as follows:

I have read every STRANGE STORIES number from its very first issue, and for its class, I find none better. Keep up the good work.

Enclosed please find a self-addressed and stamped envelope for which kindly send me a membership card in the Black Arts Club.

I would like to enroll as a MASTER because I believe my twenty-five years of study, research and experience in the realms of the occult, the three phases of Magic—Black Magic, Red Magic and White Magic—psychology, psycho-analysis and metaphysics (mental magic) entitles me to such.

I have visited several of the Lands of Mystery and Magic—Egypt, Haiti, Persia, Tibet and India, and have been a witness to many strange and uncanny things.

Hartford, Conn. Prof. A. Vinson, Ps.D., D-Pa., Ph.D.

We think that you're entitled to the MASTER'S card, Professor, and we'll be waiting to hear from you on some subject interesting to our readers.

Now for a very strange letter indeed from a member of a legerdemain and magic club:

I am applying as a MASTER in your club. I am a magician and a member of the Legerdemainiac Society and the Mystic O Magic Clubs of New York City. I have had a number of experiences which appeared as psychic phenomena. While doing a mental act I asked someone to think of a card and then to remove it from the pack. The card that was thought of had a red back—the rest of the cards had blue backs! I ended the trick right there, but I still don't know exactly what or how it happened.

This was my latest experience of this type. I was thinking of a friend of mine named Lew Dick when I passed a newsstand. Although I only had a dime with me, something made me buy your magazine. The first thing I opened up to (by accident?) was the readers' letters—and staring me in the face was a letter by Lew Dick!

Bronx, N. Y. Harry Rifas.

Speaking of magic, here's an essay on the subject by an applicant for a MASTER'S card who has read quite a bit on the subject:

A simple definition of magic was found to be as follows: The pretended art or working by the power or assistance of supernatural beings. The exact origin of magic is as uncertain as that of man himself. It is thought, however, that the first magic rite was performed because of abject terror of the unknown and the mysterious forces about, such as storms, floods, lightning, etc. The magic of beginning was simply an attempt to commune

with and make friends of these forces, and later man gave names to these and his fertile mind invented gods to be worshipped and appealed to for favors and revenge.

This gave rise to a sharp diversion of magic—black magic, the magic of revenge, hate and lust, and white magic or the magic of preservation rather than destruction. It is thought that the witches who specialized in black magic were "the devil's own children" and were inhabited by evil spirits.

That magic does exist and can be used for good or evil seems to be a question open for discussion. It is claimed that the yogas of the East can do some remarkable feats which appear to be superhuman, such as raising heat in their bodies to melt the snow around them for ten feet, lying entombed for thirty days, etc.

The skeptic says it is merely a trick, while the adept says it is inner power, and while the Western world has been busy making a living the Eastern world has given its attention to mind and magic. It is admitted that a large percent of fortune tellers are frauds. However, it does seem unaccountably strange that some are gifted with so fine a perceptive mind that they can predict another's mental condition as well as future events.

People have always had various ideas about those things. Some maintain it is harmony with power that serves them and others shrug, say "prove it," and declare that it is only fate in action. The camps of magic and non-magic have always been sharply divided and both have cited incidents to prove their points. It remains up to the individual and his intellect to decide what is merely superstition and what is not.

Denver, Colorado. Edward Jones.

And finally here's a pretty long letter from a reader who is a student of the occult and is "drawn to STRANGE STORIES, which I believe is the best magazine in the field of strange fiction, the Black Arts Department being as interesting as any of the yarns."

I have lived in isolated sections and have become interested in old houses that have their characteristics and peculiarities permeated by the thoughts of former dwellers. Some houses are filled with an atmosphere of peace, while others seem cold and unfriendly. No matter how the furnishings have been arranged, the place still retains an attitude of which the occupant is conscious and finds difficult to explain. A strange presence exists and although there is no one else in the house, the tenant feels that he is not entirely alone. The latter accounts for the prevailing atmosphere that exists in many of the so-called haunted houses.

A few of you readers may have experienced the above and like most people have dismissed the subject without further thought or remain silent in fear of being laughed at. Therefore, many interesting experiences are never brought to light. There are many theories regarding the characteristics of old dwellings, but space does not permit me to go into detail. Before closing, I wish to ex-

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plain that we are constantly sending forth thought waves. Some thought waves linger around or within the place from which they were sent forth and remain in the atmosphere for years. If the projected thoughts are of a morbid or violent nature they are apt to have a strong influence upon the sensitive. *Thought is a powerful factor. Use it wisely.*

Some time ago, I rented an abandoned farm in a remote section of New York State. It consisted of a two-story stone dwelling, a dilapidated barn and tumbled-down outbuildings. The place had been unoccupied for years.

The agent tried to discourage me by pointing out the disadvantages and advised me to look further before renting. He explained that the house had been built before the Revolutionary War and was practically in its original state. He said that there was a history connected with the place, something regarding the daughter of the original owner; a scandal of some kind, he did not know just what it was, and he went on to say that the house had sheltered officers of the Continental Army.

The house consisted of seven rooms, but being alone and having no use for such a large place I used the upper floor to store some of the previous furnishings. I was now installed in my new quarters and the four rooms which I occupied on the ground floor were made rather comfortable. It was evening, the shades were drawn, the lamps lighted and a log fire blazed upon the sitting room hearth. It had been a strenuous day and I was tired, but before going to bed, I went to the kitchen where I prepared a scant meal. After clearing the remnants of my supper I retired to an adjoining room that served as a bedchamber, blew out the light and crept beneath the covers.

It was a beautiful night and almost as bright as day. The full moon sent wide shafts of silver light through the windows, and objects in the far corners of the room assumed strange shapes in the uncertain light. For a long time I lay there listening to the stirring of the leaves and the familiar sounds of the night. Presently my eyelids became heavy and I dozed off into a light slumber.

How long I slept I do not know, but I awoke with a start and lay there listening. The clock in the sitting room struck two and from the distance came the faint, lingering howl of a dog. The room was now in total darkness and outside the wind was lashing the brush and trees. The darkness about me was all astir with little rustling movements, like the brushing of silk, the clink of metal and the low murmur of voices that spoke no language.

There were movements on the floor above as if someone was arranging the furniture that had previously been stored there and somewhere a

THE BLACK ARTS CLUB
Strange Stories Magazine,
22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

I am hereby applying for membership in THE BLACK ARTS CLUB. I am a regular reader of STRANGE STORIES, interested in the occult, and am enrolling as a

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shutter squawked on its rusty hinges. The tension became unbearable. I arose quickly and lit a lamp that stood on a wash stand near the bed. I dressed hurriedly and after a careful inspection of the house, found everything as I had left it before retiring. I knew that no living creature had entered it, but just to make sure, I examined the locked doors and securely fastened windows.

The movements on the floor above continued at intervals throughout the night and the old house seemed full of whispers. Sleep was out of the question, I was fully awake, my better judgment called me a coward and I became ashamed of my nervousness. I piled more wood on the glowing embers and sat down in a huge chair before the fire. The flames licked the dry logs and leaped upward, casting weird dancing shadows on the walls. I tried to read the local news, but it failed to hold my interest and at times I glanced uneasily about the room, for somehow I felt that I was not entirely alone. The hours dragged slowly and I sat there deep in thought as the gray streaks of dawn stole through the cracks of the shuttered windows.

With the approach of dawn the noises ceased and the house resumed its former gloomy, brooding appearance which became more noticeable as time elapsed.

The nights that followed were filled with strange noises and whispers which became part of the nightly routine and seemed perfectly natural as time passed, and I grew accustomed to the sounds. On several occasions the door at the head of the stairs opened and closed and there were footsteps on the floor above as if someone were pacing to-and-fro in a restless manner. But inspections of the premises revealed nothing. At the time of which I write, I had little or no knowledge of the "Occult" and regarded all matters pertaining to the subject as foolish superstition. Yet I could not offer an explanation for the weird happenings which occurred nightly during the six months in which I occupied the old farmhouse.

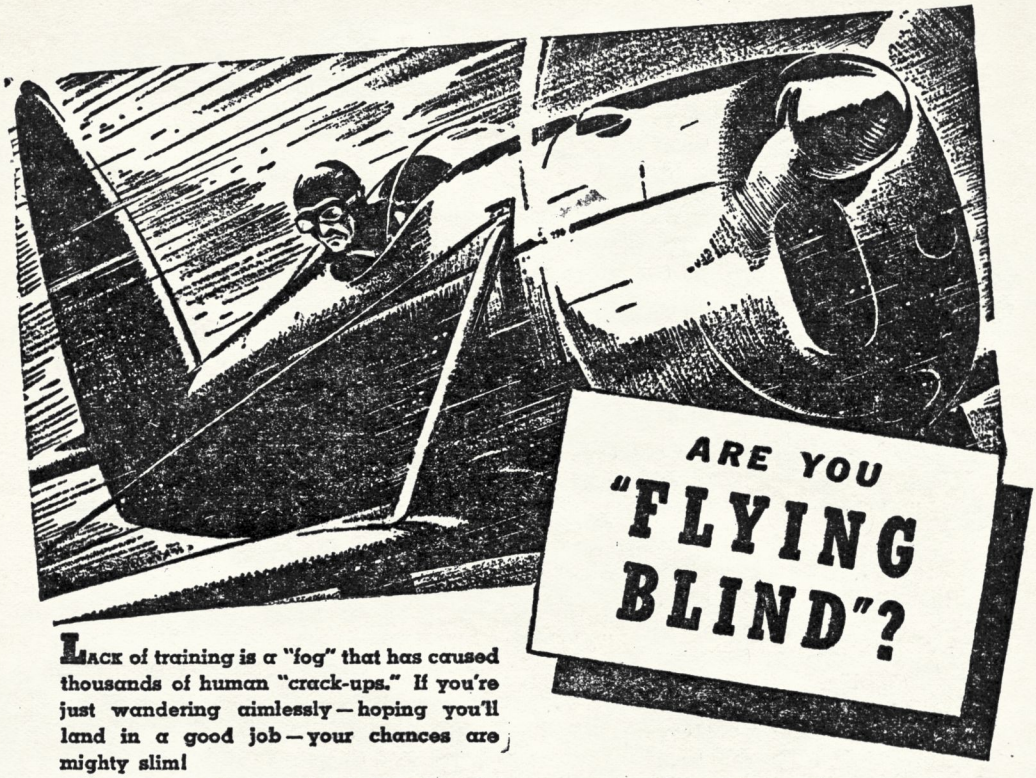
Walden, N. Y. Alexander MacDowell.

That's all for now. Those of you who haven't yet joined the Black Arts can do so now by filling out the coupon. Once more, we want to remind you that your letters to us, about the magazine in general or about the Black Arts, are more than welcome. Get into the spirit and drop us a few lines. Make this really *your* magazine!

So, until the next issue—when we have some outstanding tales in store for you! The authors include Eli Colter, Earl Pierce, Jr., August W. Derleth, Seabury Quinn, Wyatt Blasingame, E. Hoffmann Price and others. A gala issue from cover to cover—be on hand to enjoy it!

—THE EDITOR.

P. S.—Address your letters to The Editor, STRANGE STORIES, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.



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BUSINESS COURSES

☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Business Management
☐ Cartooning ☐ Civil Service
☐ College Preparatory
☐ Commercial
☐ Cost Accounting
☐ C. P. Accounting
☐ First Year College
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☐ French ☐ Grade School
☐ High School ☐ Illustrating
☐ Lettering Show Cards
☐ Managing Men at Work
☐ Railway Postal Clerk
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Secretarial
☐ Sign Lettering ☐ Spanish
☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

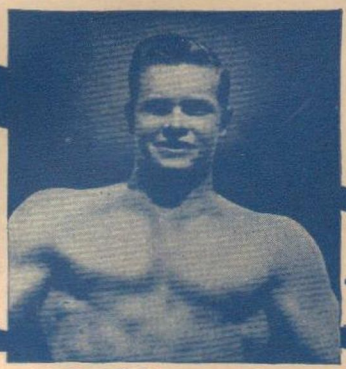
☐ Advanced Dressmaking
☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Home Dressmaking
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

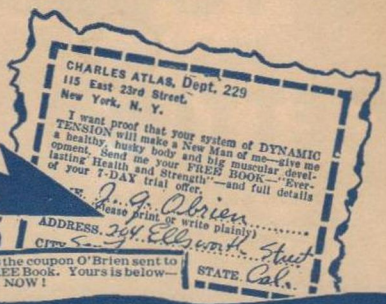
Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

HE Mailed This Coupon



J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion Cup Winner

This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' California pupils.



...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

J. G. O'BRIEN saw my coupon. He clipped and mailed it. He got my free book and followed my instructions. He became a New Man—and also won one of my Atlas-Champion, Sterling Silver Cups for his physical improvement. NOW read what he says:

"Look at me NOW! Dynamic Tension WORKS! I'm proud of the natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"—*J. G. O'Brien.*

Let Me Prove I Can Make You a New Man

Would you like to have a handsome build—greater physical development—a strong, muscular body? Then listen to this:

I, myself was once a skinny weakling of 97 lbs. I didn't know what real health or strength were. I was afraid to fight, ashamed to be seen in a swimming suit.

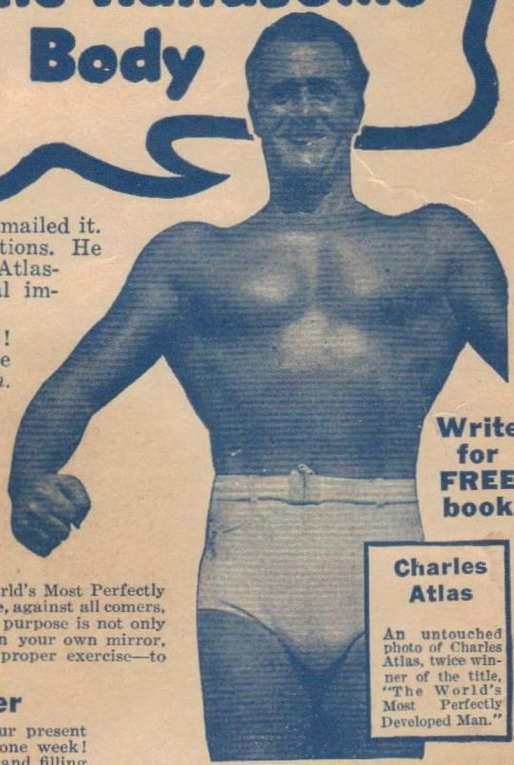
Then I discovered the secret that changed me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man," the title I won **twice** and have held **ever since,** against all comers. My secret is **Dynamic Tension.** It is a **natural** method. Its purpose is not only to give you the powerful, rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror, but also for those whose systems are sluggish from lack of proper exercise—to help them tone up their entire body, inside and out.

Accept My 7-Day Trial Offer

Do you want a better build? Are you dissatisfied with your present physical development? All I ask is a 7-DAY TRIAL. Just one week! In even that short time you will notice your chest hardening and filling out with solid muscle—or the 7-Day Trial Costs you nothing. Surely this is proof enough that by continuing with my "Dynamic Tension" method I will make you a **New Man**—give you bodily power and drive, and put you in magnificent physical condition which wins you the envy and respect of everyone.

FREE BOOK
On Dynamic Tension

Let me show you the results produced for other men! I'll send you FREE my famous book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It shows actual photos. Write your name and address carefully on coupon. Mail to me personally **today.** I'll rush your free copy to you AT ONCE! Charles Atlas, Dept. 7712, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



Write for FREE book

Charles Atlas

An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

CHARLES ATLAS
Dept. 7712, 115 East 23rd Street,
New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your **FREE** book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," and full details about your 7-DAY Trial Offer.

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

IS YOUR Rupture GETTING Worse?

It is a terrible thing to feel that your rupture is getting worse, growing larger and larger, without your *seeming* to be able to do anything about it! Haunting fear destroys mental poise and makes many *despondent.* Inability to be active takes the *physical joys* out of life.

Yes, it is terrible . . . but far more a tragedy when it is all *so absolutely needless!* Now please—and again please—do not think that this is an attempt to capitalize on your misfortune in an effort to just sell you something. We simply have information for you that has brought deliverance and joy to about 3,000,000 persons: men, women and children . . . *facts* that have satisfied thousands of doctors . . . facts we want *you* to consider, to your everlasting good!

X Where's YOUR Rupture?

STOP IT, STOP IT!

AS sure as you live and breathe, if you have a reducible rupture, you can *stop your rupture worries* and once again find the world, your work, your pleasures so full of joy and happiness that you will be an utterly new person . . . alive, vivid, energetic and happy past all the old nightmare fears that have been making your existence a bad dream.

There is no claptrap magic about the famous Brooks Air-Cushion Rupture Appliance. It isn't something experimental. It has been used and improved for years. Over 9000 doctors (who know about rupture) wear the BROOKS, or recommend it to many, many thousands of patients. What is the Patented Automatic Air-Cushion? Just this.

It is the part of the BROOKS Appliance that holds back your rupture — the most important part of any truss. It is a yielding, air-filled rubber chamber designed to a shape that clings, that holds with complete security *without gouging in.* Understand that — *without gouging in!* Ill-fitting, incorrectly designed trusses, as you know all too well, *do* gouge in.

Now here is what happens. The Brooks Air-Cushion *avoids* spreading the rupture opening and making it larger, the way some trusses do. Well, when the BROOKS permits the edges of the rupture opening to remain as close together as possible, Nature has the best chance to step in and close the opening. Mind you we don't guarantee this. But if you have reducible rupture, the BROOKS is designed to work with nature. And thousands of BROOKS users have reported the abandonment of any truss.

WRONG
Hard pad gouging in keeps Rupture open and prevents natural healing.

RIGHT
BROOKS Air-Cushion does not spread rupture opening. Gives nature a real opportunity!

YOU CAN BE SURE OF NEW FREEDOM

The very day you put on a BROOKS Patented Air-Cushion, you feel that you have been reborn to the full joys of life! Men, women and children can know this indescribable thrill. Now why—why does the BROOKS give you such exceptional results? Why is it so often most outstanding in its accomplishments? Because the cling of the Air-Cushion makes it hold as nothing else can . . . because the wearer speedily comes to realize that there can be no slipping to let the rupture down . . . that while the BROOKS protects, the dreaded specter of strangulation is banished . . . because the wearer can indulge in every normal activity . . . because physical tasks can be resumed . . . because common sense says that everything humanly possible is being accomplished to improve the rupture condition. And here is another "because," a tremendous one to those who have suffered with the miseries of a hard, gouging, burning, galling pad that never lets up, never is forgotten. Your BROOKS will have no springs, no metal girdle, no agonizing pressure devices. Instead there is the utterly comfortable Air-Cushion and a velvet soft body band.

SENT ON TRIAL!

That's one of the best parts of all. You don't have to risk your money to find out just what joy and happiness a BROOKS CAN BRING YOU! You simply try it, and if not satisfied *the trial costs you nothing!* And anyone can afford a BROOKS. It costs no more than ordinary trusses. Every BROOKS is made to individual requirements, made especialy to fit *your case.* Therefore it is *never sold in stores.* Guard against imitations. SEND THE COUPON AT ONCE.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
480-T STATE STREET MARSHALL, MICH.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

Brooks Appliance Co.
480-T State St., Marshall, Mich.

In PLAIN ENVELOPE, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER. No one is to call on me personally about my rupture.

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... State .....

State whether for Man ☐, Woman ☐, or Child ☐.